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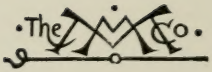
ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

MARIA EDGEWORTH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ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

MARIA EDGEWORTH

BY THE

HON. EMILY LAWLESS

New York
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1904

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PREFATORY NOTE

All the letters of Miss Edgeworth in full-sized type to be found in the following pages are new, the greater number having not only never before been published, but not even printed. For permission to make use of them, as well as for much invaluable advice in the course of writing this book, I am indebted to the kindness of Mrs. Arthur Butler (the daughter of Miss Edgeworth's youngest brother, Michael Pakenham), who has allowed me to read over a number of letters still in her possession in ms., and to select those which seemed to me of most interest. For permission to make use of the privately printed family Memoir of Miss Edgeworth I am further indebted to Mrs. Arthur Butler, and in addition to Miss Edgeworth's two nephews, Professor F. Y. Edgeworth, of All Souls' College, Oxford, and Mr. Eroles Edgeworth, the present owner of Edgeworthstown.

E. L.

Hazelhatch, Gomshall,
Surrey, *April* 1904.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

PAGE

EARLY LIFE 1

CHAPTER II

RICHARD LOVELL EDGEWORTH 18

CHAPTER III

FATHER AND DAUGHTER 31

CHAPTER IV

ARRIVAL IN IRELAND — FIRST BOOKS 44

CHAPTER V

DISTURBED DAYS 59

CHAPTER VI

NINETY-EIGHT 68

CHAPTER VII

"CASTLE RACKRENT" — IRISH LETTERS . . . 86

CHAPTER VIII

PAGE
"Belinda" — Visit to Paris 98

CHAPTER IX

Middle Life 113

CHAPTER X

"Ennui" — "The Absentee" — "Ormond" . . 127

CHAPTER XI

"Memoir of R. L. Edgeworth" — The "Quarterly" — Paris — Geneva 146

CHAPTER XII

Friendship with Scott 162

CHAPTER XIII

Later Life 180

CHAPTER XIV

Conclusion 210

Index 215

MARIA EDGEWORTH

MARIA EDGEWORTH

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

It is as the author of Irish books that Maria Edgeworth's fame stands surest, and it is upon this aspect that her present biographer mainly relies in venturing to set foot upon a field which has already been explored by not a few able pilgrims. The history of the Edgeworth family, especially of that very remarkable personage Mr. Richard Lovell Edgeworth, his complicated marriage arrangements, his relations with his daughter Maria, her submissiveness to his views of literature, and the further question of how far that submissiveness has, or has not, injured her own position as an author,—all this has formed the theme of a good many capable pens. It happens, however, that all who have occupied themselves with Maria Edgeworth have, so far as my researches have gone, been English; consequently the more purely Irish side of her writings, as well as the influence which those writings have exercised in Ireland itself, have either been neglected, or been treated as merely incidental. There is little in Mr. Hare's two volumes that would enable a reader to realise the quite exceptional affection

felt by all the members of the Edgeworth family for their Irish home. In the earlier *Life* by Miss Zimmern, published in the "Eminent Women" series, the lack of interest in this part of the subject is yet plainer — may almost be said to go to the length of antipathy. Two extracts will suffice to illustrate this. The first concerns Ireland as a whole: —

"Ireland is not amongst those countries that arouse in the hearts of strangers a desire to pitch their tents, and to judge from the readiness with which her own children leave her, we cannot suppose that they find her a fascinating land. And little wonder, when we consider the state of ferment and disorder which in a greater or less degree has always prevailed there."

The next concerns County Longford: —

"Neither was there much congenial society. The Edgeworths had no liking for the country gentlemen who spent their lives in shooting, hunting, and carousing; booby squires who did not even know that their position put duties upon them. Formal dinners, and long sittings, with the smallest of small talk, were the order of the day and night. They were, however, fortunate in finding in this social wilderness some few persons really worth knowing, chief among whom were the families resident at Pakenham Hall and Castle Forbes."

The last remark is perfectly true. Pakenham Hall and Castle Forbes were both sources of great enjoyment to all the Edgeworth family, and especially to Maria. Apart from this there were, however, alleviations. Moreover, County Longford, even County Longford in the years immediately preceding the Rebellion of '98, was not quite so deplorably dismal a place to live in as the foregoing extract would imply. There is an unmistakable stamp of unfamiliarity about the

whole picture — "booby squires," "formal dinners," and "small talk," not being any of them details which bring Ireland particularly vividly before the mind. In such matters the personal bias no doubt counts for a good deal, and — far from regarding her as having been too deeply immersed in any Irish "social wilderness" — the worst deprivation which, in the opinion of her present biographer, Maria Edgeworth had to endure, was that no part of her childhood, save for a brief time when she was about eight years old, ever was spent in Ireland. This is a point which will have to be returned to later, so only needs to be touched upon here, before going on to consider the few, and not particularly interesting, facts which have survived with regard to her infancy and early girlhood.

She was born on the first day of the year 1767, at the house of her mother's father, Mr. Elers, at Black Bourton, some fourteen miles from Oxford, her father and mother having been married while the former was still an undergraduate, and under nineteen years of age. How far the failure of that marriage is to be ascribed to this circumstance is an open question. What is quite certain is that, for a man who afterwards rather distinguished himself as a husband, Mr. Edgeworth's first *début* in that character cannot be called brilliant. Upon whichever pair of shoulders the blame ought to lie, by general consent the marriage was far from a success. Five children were born of it, a son Richard, in 1766, Maria herself, as stated, in 1767, two daughters, Anna and Emmeline, and an infant which died young. Shortly after the birth of her last child Mrs. Edgeworth herself died, at the house of her aunts, the Miss Blakes, in Great Russell Street. It has been noted

with some surprise how casual, almost indifferent, the references to her own mother were apt to be, on the part of one, not only so affectionate, but so invariably dutiful as Maria Edgeworth. At the time of that mother's death she was, it must be remembered, barely six years old, and she recalled little of the event beyond the fact of having been taken into the bedroom to receive the poor woman's dying kiss. It followed that her first definite impressions as to the meaning of the word "mother" came to be associated, not with the rather depressed and sickly woman whom she had first called by that name, but with the young and remarkably pretty stepmother, whose advent upon the scene was only delayed about four months.

The beauty of this new mother, Miss Honora Sneyd, is always spoken of enthusiastically by all who have occasion to mention her name. An anecdote is told of the small Maria, when about seven years old, standing beside her stepmother's dressing-table, and looking up in her face with a sudden and irresistible impression of "How beautiful!" Apart from such spontaneous tributes, her submissiveness as a daughter knew no bounds, not only towards this stepmother, who, arriving on the scene when she was a small child, would naturally receive it, but also — where it seems scarcely equally inevitable — to a succession of other stepmothers, the latest of whom was actually younger than herself, and who arrived in a house of which she, as the eldest daughter, was presumably the mistress, and was in any case already well known and distinguished, alike as woman and as author.

This, however, is wild anticipation! At the date at which we have arrived Maria Edgeworth was still

a tiny child, fresh from the nursery of Great Russell Street, where her chief recreation seems to have consisted in being taken for walks by her great-aunts, the dignified Miss Blakes, in the neighbourhood of the British Museum and similar resorts. Shortly after his new marriage Mr. Edgeworth took his wife and children to Edgeworthstown, to which he had succeeded a few years earlier upon the death of his father. This appears, however, to have been a mere family episode, and to have made hardly any permanent impression upon Maria's own mind. When in later years she endeavoured to re-awaken the recollections which this first visit to the family home had left behind, little or nothing seems to have survived. Of Ireland itself, or what is called "local colour," there does not seem to have been even a trace. Two prominent incidents indeed emerged out of the void. She remembered, so her stepmother assures us, cutting out the squares of a checked sofa-cover with a pair of scissors, which some one had incautiously left within reach of her active little fingers. What occurred when the owner of those scissors returned does not, strange to say, seem to have left any particular impression upon her mind! A more heroic piece of mischief consisted in trampling through a set of newly glazed garden frames, which had been laid out upon the grass; and it is characteristic that, even after an interval of more than fifty years, the heavenly crash and smashing noise of that breaking glass was still, so she told one of her relations, vividly present to her mind. Recalling how little girls, or for that matter little girls' mothers and aunts, were shod in and about the year 1774, the remarkable part of this anecdote seems to be

that no permanent injury was sustained by any one, with the exception of the ill-fated garden frames.

Soon — a great deal too soon for her own future interests as a romancer — these scenes of youthful guilt were left behind. Unlike luckier children, who are born to permanent Irish homes, poor little Maria Edgeworth's buccaneering days were very early over and done with. The doors of the prison-house — in other words, the doors of Mrs. Lataffiere's superior seminary for young ladies at Derby — were shortly to close behind her. At eight years old she left Edgeworthstown, not again to set foot on Irish soil for seven long years.

Of these seven years not many details seem to have been preserved. With the easy optimism of the biographer, Mr. Hare assures us that from the period of their mother's death, Maria and her sisters enjoyed "a childhood of unclouded happiness." How many childhoods of unclouded happiness, outside the pages of biographies, there have ever been, is a question that it would take us some time to discuss. In Maria Edgeworth's case it does not seem to have been more unflecked with clouds than other childhoods. Indeed, bearing in mind the date of it, and the very active and zealous part played by rod and taws in those days — in educational establishments dedicated to little girls hardly less than in those dedicated to their brothers — we may feel certain that it was crossed by a good many discomforts, which in maturer years we should be apt to describe as tolerably full-grown sufferings. That her spirit was effectually subdued by the discipline is at least clear. The brief days of liberty and of light-hearted marauding; the days of sofa-cover-

cutting and of frame-smashing, were gone for ever. If we wish to see how far the pendulum had swung in the opposite direction, we have only to study the following artless epistle, written to her first stepmother in 1776, when she must have been a little over nine years old: —

"DERBY, *March* 30, 1776.

"DEAR MAMMA, — It is with the greatest pleasure I write to you, as I flatter myself it will make you happy to hear from me. I hope you and my dear papa are well. School now seems agreeable to me. I have begun French and dancing, and intend to make " [" great " was written here, but on second thoughts struck out] " improvement in everything I learn. I know that it will give you great satisfaction to know that I am a good girl. My cousin Clay sends her love to you; mine to my father and sisters, who I hope are well. Pray give my duty to papa, and accept the same from, dear Mamma, — your dutiful Daughter."

The year 1780 stands out as a rather noteworthy date in Maria Edgeworth's youthful history. Three events occurred in it, all three of no small importance to her. The first of these was the death from consumption of her first stepmother; the second was the marriage of her father within a few months to another stepmother, who was the sister of the preceding one; the third, and what perhaps at the time was the most important to herself of these three events, was her own removal from Mrs. Lataffiere's school in Derby, to the more advanced one of Mrs. Davis in Upper Wimpole Street, London. At this establishment we are assured that " she had excellent masters," but the honours of her education seem in reality to have fallen rather to her old school, since the unpublished family memoir tells us that she had been so well grounded in French and

Italian by Mr. Lataffiere, the husband of her first schoolmistress, that when she came to do the exercises set to her class at Mrs. Davis's, she found them so easy that she wrote out the whole quarter's exercises at once, "keeping them strung together in her desk, and, while the other girls were labouring at their tasks, she had all that time for reading what she pleased to herself, and, when the French master came round for the exercises, had only to unstring hers, and present it."

For a young person who was already an omnivorous reader, and even in a mild way a budding author, this was a propitious circumstance. Maria Edgeworth's long literary life of nearly sixty years may be said to have begun officially a little before this date, upon the receipt of an order from her father to send him a tale — "about the length of a Spectator, on the subject of Generosity." It was to be taken, so the order ran, "from History or Romance, and must be sent the day s'ennight after you receive this, and I beg you will take some pains about it." These directions were appropriately issued from that home of the muses, Lichfield, the same subject having been also given to a "young gentleman from Oxford," who was, it seems, upon a visit there. Mr. Edgeworth's brother-in-law, Mr. Sneyd, was requested to decide upon the respective merits of the competitors, and he unhesitatingly pronounced in favour of Maria's version. "An excellent story and extremely well written, but where's the Generosity?" was the form which his verdict took, a saying which she was fond herself of using afterwards as a sort of proverb.

This early effort has not apparently been preserved,

and at school her story-telling instincts took what was the more immediately successful form of improvisation. At Derby, and later at Wimpole Street, she appears to have had the satisfaction of keeping awake all who had the advantage of sharing a bedroom with her. It was not without considerable emotion that I recently ascertained that — unlike the stern utilitarianism of later years — these first products of Miss Edgeworth's muse seem to have dipped decidedly into those elements of Romance, and even of Horror, which she afterwards held it to be one of her main duties to crush down and reprobate. So, at least, I am forced to conclude, on finding — also from unpublished sources — that a character in one of the tales which was specially applauded by her room-mates, was that of a hero, or more probably a villain, who had the exceptional good fortune to possess "a mask made from the dried skin taken from a dead man's face, which he put on when he wished to be disguised, and which he at other times kept buried at the foot of a tree!"

While still at Mrs. Davis's school, and still engaged in the concoction of these thrilling, if very uncharacteristic devices, Maria was overtaken by what seemed likely to become a serious, not to say a lifelong trouble. Her eyes became so painfully inflamed that she was unable to use them. By her father's orders she was accordingly taken to "one of the first physicians of the day in London" — oculists were apparently beings as yet uninvented. This gentleman's methods seem to have been as considerate as his diagnosis was accurate. Placing the little girl between his knees, he examined her eyes, and at once loudly announced in a tone of absolute certainty, "She will lose her sight."

In spite of this cheerful and kindly verdict, she fortunately did nothing of the kind, although her eyes continued for some time to be a trouble to her.

It was while still suffering from this discomfort that she was sent to spend her holidays at Anningsly, in the house of that formidable disciplinarian, Mr. Thomas Day, the author of *Sandford and Merton*.

Mr. Day is one of those incredibly erratic mortals, dear to the student of human nature, who, when they cross the path of a biographer, are apt to turn him aside for a while from his proper business. He and Mr. Edgeworth had met for the first time at a house called Hare Hatch, where their friendship seems to have sprung into existence at once. Their next meeting was at Lichfield, where they formed part of a very accomplished and erudite circle. "Mr. Day's appearance was not," his candid friend says, "at that time prepossessing. He seldom combed his raven locks, though he was remarkably fond of washing in the stream." This visit to Lichfield may have been one of the rarer occasions upon which his hair was combed, for he had just made up his mind, after some hesitation, to pay his addresses to no less a person than the beautiful Honora Sneyd, mentioned a page back as having at a later date become the second wife of Mr. Edgeworth himself. That determination Mr. Day confided to his friend, who, being still safely married to his first wife, was felt to be an appropriate confidant. He further confided to him a declaratory letter, to be delivered to Miss Sneyd, in which he explained the terms upon which alone he could be induced to offer his hand and heart to any woman. Seeing that these terms included, amongst

other details, an absolute submission to the marital rule, especially in the matter of feminine dress, as well as an abstention from all the ordinary amenities of life, including such trifles as music, poetry, light literature, and epistolary correspondence, it will be seen that the letter did not come short in the matter of frankness. Whether in consequence of this engaging programme, or because her attention was distracted by the too great agreeableness of the messenger, Miss Sneyd declined the proposals, although Mr. Edgeworth assures us that she did so "in terms of the most studied propriety." "She would not" — this is from his own published account of the incident — "admit the unqualified control of a husband over all her actions. She did not feel that exclusion from society was indispensably necessary to preserve female virtue, or to secure domestic happiness." Furthermore, "since Mr. Day had decidedly declared his determination to live in perfect seclusion from what is usually called the world, it was fit she should decidedly declare, that she would not change her present mode of life, with which she had no reason to be dissatisfied, for any dark and untried system that could be proposed to her." Poor Mr. Day was not only greatly surprised, but extremely mortified by this rejection, no matter how beautifully it may have been worded. So great was the effect which it had upon his mind that — having discreetly left him to peruse the letter by himself — "when I returned," says Mr. Edgeworth, "I found him actually in a fever!" So serious was this fever, that it was found necessary to summon the great Doctor Darwin, author of *The Botanic Garden*, and grandfather of Charles Darwin, who was then

living at Lichfield; nor was the patient able to be aroused from his dejection until the fortunate arrival at Lichfield of another Miss Sneyd, Elizabeth by name, who appeared there in company with her father, and no less than three more of her sisters.

This second Miss Sneyd is described by Mr. Edgeworth — who ought to have known about both sisters if any one did — as having "more wit, more vivacity, and certainly more humour than her sister. She had, however, less personal grace; she walked heavily, danced indifferently, and had much less energy of manner and of character." In spite of a painful suspicion of fashion which hung about her, and to which he naturally objected, Mr. Day was seen to observe this young lady "with complacent attention." Her indifferent dancing was a source of particular gratification to him, dancing being one of those "female accomplishments" to which he had a rooted objection. Her conversation, moreover, satisfied his taste, apparently because, having no strong views of her own, "Mr. Day had liberty and room enough" — this again is his candid friend's view of the matter — "to descant at large and at length upon whatever became the subject of conversation." Here seemed to be the wife selected for him by destiny! In spite, however, of these promising auguries, the affair again miscarried. At first the young lady showed herself more complacent than her sister, only stipulating that if she, to oblige him, abstained from all the pleasures and lighter accomplishments of life, Mr. Day should on his side endeavour to acquire some of those graces of personal deportment of which he stood so manifestly in need. With a lack of consistency hardly to be

expected of so rigid a moralist, he consented to this bargain, and accompanied his friend Mr. Edgeworth, who, for reasons of his own, as will presently be seen, was just then leaving Lichfield for France. Here, under the charge of a French dancing-master, Mr. Day heroically put himself through a succession of severe tortures, in the hopes of persuading his limbs to become more pliable, and thereby to acquire those graces which nature had in his case so inconsiderately withheld. Unfortunately his efforts proved to be of no avail. Either nature was herself too stubborn, or some other hindrance intervened. When, upon his return to Lichfield, he hastened to claim the reward of his labours, not only did Miss Elizabeth Sneyd refuse to accede to his wishes, but she was actually cruel enough to declare that she "liked him better as he was before." When we realise that both these Miss Sneyds — not only Honora, but also, in her turn, Elizabeth — became the wife of his brilliant friend and confidant Mr. Edgeworth, we cannot avoid a tribute of admiration to a friendship which proved to be of a texture tough enough to withstand two such very trying ordeals!

At the date in which the small Maria arrived to pay a visit under his roof, these earlier vicissitudes in Mr. Day's matrimonial career were long over. So also were another and an even more remarkable series, which it would take too long to enter upon at present. By one of those extraordinary coincidences which, when they occur in real life, can — fortunately for the characters of biographers — generally be substantiated, Mr. Day had found, or there had been found for him, the precise wife for which his requiring soul had so long

vainly panted. She was amiable; youthful; she was pleasing to look at, if not particularly handsome; she was ready to adore him; she was wealthy; above all she was submissive to any and every vagary which might chance to cross the fevered brain of her lord. In short, she seems to have been precisely the wife that might be expected to be provided for a disciplinarian from on high! Thus provided, and naturally calmed by a submission so absolute, Mr. Day's first educational austerities had by this time softened. Enough still remained to cause him, one feels, to have been quite a sufficiently formidable host to a shy and rather delicate youthful guest. In the memoir of her stepdaughter, Mrs. Edgeworth assures us that "the icy strength of his" (Mr. Day's) "system came at the right moment for annealing her" (Maria's) "principles," whatever precisely may be meant by *that*. Of this "icy strength," as applied to other people, we do indeed hear one instance. That detestable legacy of an illustrious prelate —"Bishop Berkeley's tar-water"—was still at that date pursuing its dreadful career, and carrying tears and misery into innumerable families. Here was a chance for a disciplinarian! "Mr. Day thought that the tar-water would be of use to Maria's inflamed eyes," the polite Mrs. Edgeworth relates, and accordingly "he used to bring a large tumbler full of it to her every morning." Evidently the specific was not intended to be applied to her eyes, but quite otherwise, for we are expressly told that she dreaded to hear his "Now, Miss Maria, drink this!"—although her stepmother is again good enough to remark, that "in spite of his stern voice, there was something of pity in his countenance which always induced her to swallow it."

Any reader of these lines who is old enough to remember the days of unmitigated dosing — those days when, as the author of *The Water Babies* truly says, an infant's inside was regarded as much the same thing as that of a Scotch grenadier — will perhaps kindly pause for a moment, and meditate sympathetically upon this picture. Instinctively there rises before the mind's eye the vision of some cold winter's morning, and of a shivering small person waking up in the rawness of an as yet unwarmed nursery, or similar dormitory. Before the eyes of that small person there presently enters an executioner in *déshabille*, carrying a cup, which cup is — abhorrent vision! — being slowly stirred by a spoon, to which loathly red or black particles adhere! If to this once too familiar picture the reader will kindly add one crowning terror more, that of the author of *Sandford and Merton*, with his oft-described long black locks floating behind him, the detestable cup in his hands, and clad presumably in a quite ungarnished dressing-gown; such a reader will, I think, agree with me that the cup — too literally cup — of Maria Edgeworth's youthful troubles must now and then have been felt to fairly brim over!

While upon the subject of such early tribulations, there is yet another which ought to be described here, although in this case the petty martyrdom had to be endured — not while enjoying the pleasures of a friendly visit — but, more appropriately, as forming part of the arcana of her school life. Naturally in so superior an establishment as that of Mrs. Davis in Upper Wimpole Street, all the ordinary calisthenic appurtenances, in the form of backboards, iron collars, and dumb-bells, were

provided. These, it seems, were not considered to be sufficient in Maria's case. For her special benefit one more had to be added, one which even the judicious family biographer seems to have regarded as rather severe. She was now fourteen years of age, and her shortness was observed with no little disapproval by her own family circle. The Edgeworths had always been a well-grown race, and so pronounced a lack, at once of height and of good looks, seemed like a decided slight to the family standard. To obviate this shortness, not only therefore were all the above-named "usual" exercises resorted to, but also one which Mrs. Edgeworth herself characterises as "unusual," that, namely, of "being swung by the neck to draw out the muscles, and so increase the growth."

Unfortunately all this well-meant, if surely rather too agonising, discipline proved to be of absolutely no avail. Short she was, and short she was destined to remain. One of the very few persons whom it has been my own good fortune to meet with who was actually acquainted with Miss Edgeworth, has described to me the excitement created by her arrival at a house in which my informant — then a child of six — was herself staying, and amongst the few salient points which were recalled, the excessive shortness of the visitor was perhaps the most salient. "Small? Yes; she was *exceedingly* small, except for her nose, which, I remember, seemed to me to be very big!" Evidently the discrepancy between the height, the nose, and the enormous reputation of the guest was the point which left the most vivid impression on the mind of her youthful acquaintance. And this brings me back to the year 1782, in which year it was that at last,

and as it happily proved permanently, Ireland began to loom large upon Maria Edgeworth's horizon. Before following her thither it will be necessary for us to retrace our steps a little, in order to pick up some of the other scattered threads of the family history.

NOTE. — Only one authentic portrait of Miss Edgeworth seems to be extant, namely a drawing done in 1785 by Adam Buck, in which she forms part of a large family group; it will be found fully described by Mrs. Richmond Ritchie, in the Introduction to Messrs. Macmillan's collected edition, vol. i. page xviii. In connection with this point, it is rather amusing to realise that the portrait which serves as the frontispiece to the *Life and Letters* by Mr. Hare is not a likeness of Miss Edgeworth at all. It was a purely "fancy piece," executed for some American magazine, and embodied apparently the artist's idea of how an authoress *ought* to be shown — seated, namely, with one elbow upon a pile of her own books, and a finger pointed significantly towards her brow. It has been identified as being the very "portrait" sent by herself as a joke to her aunt, Mrs. Ruxton, with the inscription — "O, said the little woman, this is none of I!"

CHAPTER II

RICHARD LOVELL EDGEWORTH

No study of Maria Edgeworth, however slight, could possibly pretend to completeness without a somewhat careful survey of her father. The admirers of her admirable gifts are apt, with hardly an exception, to bear a somewhat heated grudge against the memory of this too consciously edifying Richard Lovell Edgeworth. They are wont to consider that the author of Miss Edgeworth's being was also too frequently the author of the least satisfactory portions of her books. Even when not actually guiding her pen — a piece of parental presumption of which he was perfectly capable — in spirit he hovered over it, and that a desire for the paternal approbation was with her the first and strongest of all incentives there can be no question. Wherever, in her case, the didactic impulse is seen to distinctly overpower the creative one; wherever we find Utility lauded to the skies as the only guide of an otherwise foundering humanity; above all, wherever we find an enormous emphasis laid upon the necessity at all times and places of a due subordination of the feminine to the masculine judgment, — there we may feel sure that we are upon his track, and that such sentiments were uttered primarily with a view to the approbation of the domestic critic.

Like the rest of our race — wise, witty, or the reverse — Richard Lovell Edgeworth was emphatically the child of his forebears; indeed he seems in certain respects to have been even more directly traceable to them than is usually the case. With regard to the causes which induced the Edgeworth family to settle originally in Ireland, little appears to be accurately known. There is a vague report of a monk — one Roger Edgeworth — who is asserted to have broken his vows and married for love, but we find no mention of him in Mr. Edgeworth's own memoir, which is our principal source of information with regard to the family. The year 1583 is the date fixed upon for their arrival in Ireland, before which time they are said to have been settled at Edgeware, in Middlesex, which is even declared to have been once called Edgeworth, though the data for any such connection appear to be entirely apocryphal. The first Irish Edgeworth who emerges clearly into sight is Edward Edgeworth, Bishop of Down and Connor, who, dying without children in the year 1593, left his fortune to his brother Francis, at one time a clerk of the Hanaper, and the direct ancestor of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, consequently of his daughter Maria. This Francis Edgeworth married the daughter of a Sir Edmond Tuite, owner of a place called Sonna, in the county of Westmeath. She is described by her descendant as "beautiful, and of an ancient family," and he further relates that having been obliged on some occasion to give place at church to a neighbour, upon her return home she indignantly pressed her husband to take out a baronet's patent, thereby insuring against such ignominies in the future. This he declined to do, declaring, with commendable

prudence, such patents to be "more onerous than honourable." She thereupon announced her intention of going no more to church, and he, in a tone which brings the connubial conversations of *Castle Rackrent* strongly before our mind, retorted that "she might stay, or go wherever she pleased." The permission so given she accepted, more literally apparently than it was meant, and quitting, not alone her husband, but Ireland, she betook herself to the English court, where she became attached in some capacity to the Queen, Henrietta Maria, whom she afterwards accompanied to France. After the queen's death, she returned, we are informed, to Ireland, having in the meantime become a Roman Catholic, and disregarding the claims of her family, she there "laid out a very large fortune in founding a religious house in Dublin."

So runs the account in Mr. Edgeworth's own autobiography, which occupies the first volume of his daughter's memoir of him. It is clear, however, that this part of the family history must be taken with a considerable amount of reserve, since in the very next paragraph the writer of it assures us that the son of this lady, Captain John Edgeworth, was with his wife and infant heir settled in the Castle of Cranallagh, in county Longford, in the year 1641. That in the same year, he being at a distance upon military duty, the rebels rose, attacked the castle, set fire to it at night, dragged the unfortunate lady out, "literally naked"; that the castle was plundered, and would have been entirely destroyed but that — here the mystery comes in — the rebels were persuaded to extinguish the fire from "reverence for the picture of Jane Edgeworth, which was painted upon the wainscot, with a cross

hanging from her neck, and a rosary in her hands. Being a Catholic, and having founded a religious house, she was considered a saint."

A more confusing piece of family history surely never was printed. How Mrs. Jane Edgeworth could possibly have been regarded as a saint in Ireland, in the year 1641, on account of having established a religious house in Dublin, which we are expressly told was not founded till after Queen Henrietta's death, an event that occurred twenty-eight years later, is an unfathomable mystery. The only way of explaining that mystery seems to be to suppose that the family records had got hopelessly mixed, and that, when he came to write his own memoirs, Mr. Edgeworth trusted — as he well might — to that Cimmerian darkness as regards Ireland and Irish history, which probably prevailed all but universally in his day, and has only been very partially dissipated in ours.

Leaving this portion of his record as too hopelessly tangled to unravel, we pass on to the study of his own and his family's later history.

With regard to the unfortunate infant heir of the castle, a series of terrific adventures is recorded upon that same fateful night. Indeed if the Edgeworth family annals come now and then a little short in the matter of mere bald accuracy, they more than make up for that defect by their supply of graphic and alluring detail. Take the following instance as a sample: —

"One of the rebels seized the child by the leg, and was in the act of swinging him round to dash his brains out against the corner of the castle wall, when an Irish servant, of the lowest order, stopped his hand, claiming the right of killing the little heretic himself, and swearing that a sudden death

would be too good for him; that he would plunge him up to the throat in a boghole, and leave him for the crows to pick his eyes out. Snatching the child from his comrade, he ran off with it to a neighbouring bog, and thrust it into the mud; but, when the rebels had retired, this man, who had only pretended to join them, went back to the bog for the boy, preserved his life, and, contriving to hide him in a pannier under eggs and chickens, carried him actually through the midst of the rebel camp safely back to Dublin!"

The expedient of hiding a child in a pannier, which is afterwards filled up with eggs and chickens, and carried through a camp of hungry rebels, does not somehow appeal to the mind as quite the safest that could have been devised. However, the child escaped, which is the main point of the story, and in due course came to have other, if hardly equally perilous, adventures. Not so his mother. Whether from the shock, or from some other cause, the poor lady did not long survive that disastrous night. She died shortly afterwards in England, where she and her husband, Captain Edgeworth, were then living, and upon her death he determined to return to Ireland. What happened to him on his homeward journey must again be told in his descendant's words:—

"On his way thither, he stopped a day at Chester, it being Christmas Day. He went to the Cathedral, and there he was struck with the sight of a lady, who had a full-blown rose in her bosom. This lady was Mrs. Bridgman, widow of Sir Edward Bridgman, brother to Sir Orlando Bridgman, the Lord Keeper. As she was coming out of church, the rose fell at Captain Edgeworth's feet. The lady was handsome—so was the captain. He took up the rose, and presented it with so much grace to Mrs. Bridgman, that in consequence they became acquainted, and were soon after married. They came over to Ireland."

It is easy to imagine the gratification which Mr. Edgeworth must have felt in having possessed at least one ancestor so entirely worthy of himself. The whole scene — the newly made widower, the lady, the gallant captain, the full-blown rose, the grace of the action; finally — marriage, and a journey to Ireland. There is something about it positively prophetic! By her previous marriage this lady had an only daughter, an heiress, whereas Captain Edgeworth had, as has been said, one son. Though brought up in the closest connection, the young people were of course no relation to one another. They fell in love, but the young lady's mother being averse to the marriage, and the laws against running away with heiresses serious, the matter had to be arranged by the bride taking her bridegroom to church mounted *behind*, instead of before, her on the horse; — an anecdote with regard to which we can only say, that a law that could be evaded by so infantile an expedient was a law which thoroughly deserved to be evaded.

And here we are confronted by yet another rather surprising little fragment of family history. The son of this couple was Mr. Edgeworth's own grandfather, consequently he might be expected to know something definite about him. In his memoir, however, he assures us that the child was born "before the joint ages of his father and mother amounted to thirty-one years," an assertion which is enough to take a harmless biographer's breath away! Assuming, as one naturally would do, that the age of the youthful father could hardly have been less than seventeen or eighteen years, that of the mother sinks to a figure that is positively portentous! Upon referring the matter,

however, to an authority outside that of the memoir, it has been recently ascertained, not without relief, that by an unwritten family tradition the ages of both parents have been fixed at fifteen years and six months. Even so, the incident is unusual.

The marriage, thus merrily begun, seems to have gone on pretty much as might have been expected from its start. The extravagance of the young couple was phenomenal, even for a not very economical age — that of Charles the Second. As an instance of it, the gentleman on one occasion parted with "the ground-plot of a house in Dublin to buy a crowned hat with feathers, which was then the mode." The lady, in addition to her extravagance, had a lively temper, and was in the habit of twitting her husband with the fortune which she had brought him. Although a believer in ghosts and goblins, she on one occasion exhibited remarkable courage, if the account given of the affair is accurate. Here it is in her descendant's words: —

"While she was living at Lissard, she was, on some sudden alarm, obliged to go at night to a garret at the top of the house for some gunpowder, which was kept there in a barrel. She was followed upstairs by an ignorant servant girl, who carried a bit of candle without a candlestick between her fingers. When Lady Edgeworth had taken what gunpowder she wanted, had locked the door, and was halfway down-stairs again, she observed that the girl had not her candle, and asked what she had done with it; the girl recollected and answered that she had left it '*stuck in the barrel of black salt.*' Lady Edgeworth bid her stand still, and instantly returned by herself to the room where the gunpowder was; found the candle as the girl had described; put her hand carefully underneath it, carried it safely out; and when she got to the bottom of the stairs, dropped on her knees, and thanked God for their deliverance."

The last sentence has a familiar ring, but the anecdote is fresh and exciting enough. Whether open barrels of gunpowder, ready for any one who liked to dip into, were common objects in the attics of even Irish country houses a couple of centuries ago, may be questioned. How the lady and her maid got downstairs in the dark, without remembering they had left the candle behind them, is another note of interrogation — but this is mere belated captiousness! The eldest son of this heroine, Francis Edgeworth, was known, we learn, as "Protestant Frank," and raised a regiment in his youth for King William, a service for which the family were never paid. He also married a succession of wives, which seems to have been by this time quite an established family habit; and was rather noted as a gambler, on one occasion going so far as to stake the diamond earrings which his wife — one, that is to say, of his wives — was at the moment wearing, and which she had to take out of her ears for the purpose.

Coming down to the period of Mr. Edgeworth himself and of his father, we find ourselves in much tamer days. Of the latter, not so much as a single anecdote is recorded; while of the former, though of course the hero of the record, the most salient early event we hear of him is that in a fit of infantine rage he one day flung a red-hot smoothing-iron across the nursery table at his elder brother, an incident chiefly important from the fact that it served as the text of an excellent sermon preached to him by his mother upon the dangers of impetuosity. Owing to his brother's early death — an event quite disconnected, let me hasten to say, from the red-hot smoothing-iron — she showed

unnecessary anxiety, he tells us, about his own health, which was perfectly good, and it was only with infinite precautions that he was even allowed to take his accustomed morning airing, mounted on horseback behind the family coachman. On the other hand, she displayed great discrimination, in his opinion, with regard to the disciplining of his mind, early implanting in it those lessons of utilitarianism which it was his pride and satisfaction to pass on afterwards to his own daughter, and through her to whole generations of Harrys and Lucys, Richards and Marias, as yet unborn.

He was first sent to a school at Warwick, from which he was transferred to one at Drogheda, where he was as much mocked at, he tells us, for his English accent as he had previously been at Warwick for his Irish brogue; from which school, upon attaining the age of seventeen, he was despatched to Trinity College, Dublin. Here it is evident that his health was under no peril from too severe a course of study, since he expressly informs us that "it was not the fashion in those days to plague fellow-commoners with lectures." Possibly it may have been on account of this considerate custom that his father presently transferred him to Corpus Christi, Oxford, placing him under some sort of tutelage with an old friend of his own, Mr. Elers, then living at Black Bourton, a gentleman who — a very important point — was the father of several daughters!

It was due to this arrangement that the first, and much the least successful, of Mr. Edgeworth's many marriages came to pass. What the rights and wrongs of that story were it is, as I have already said, impossible at this date to ascertain, and, since we are

unable to hear both sides, we must be content to accept the only articulate one. That, like many another man before and since, young Mr. Edgeworth went further than he had intended is plain, and we must at least give him credit for having carried the affair to its legitimate conclusion. The young people eloped in correct romantic fashion, in a post chaise, and were married at Gretna Green. This is his own account of the matter — an eminently characteristic one: —

"Before I went to Bath, one of the young ladies at Black Bourton had attracted my attention; I had paid my court to her, and I felt myself entangled so completely, that I could not find any honourable means of extrication. I have not to reproach myself with any deceit, or suppression of the truth. On my return to Black Bourton, I did not conceal the altered state of my mind, but having engaged the affections of the young lady, I married while I was still a youth at college. I resolved to meet the disagreeable consequences of such a step with fortitude, and without being dispirited by the loss of the society to which I had been accustomed."

It is a relief to the sympathetic reader to find that the deprivation, confronted with so heroic a fortitude, was anything but an eternal one! Not long after his marriage, Mr. Edgeworth made his appearance at Lichfield without his wife, and there took his place amid a circle of distinguished and erudite persons, whose sayings and doings have been considerably reported. The two chief stars just then in that social firmament formed a marked and an agreeable contrast to one another. One of them was Doctor Darwin, already alluded to in the last chapter, a savant who contrived to impart science through the medium of

poetry, but whose botany and zoology were apt to be a trifle warped by his favourite theories. The other was Miss Anna Seward, known locally as "The Swan of Lichfield," the authoress of several volumes of "elegant" verse, who, with her father, a canon of Lichfield, and her cousin, Miss Honora Sneyd, was at that time residing at the Palace, it is not very clear why, but presumably in the absence of its bishop.

Like other rival stars in other social firmaments, these two of Lichfield evidently did not waste much time in admiration for one another, and various anecdotes are told of the occasions when their conflicting claims came into rather sharp collision. In addition to these, the major luminaries of the place, there was a whole galaxy of minor ones, and, high in this secondary rank, we find our disciplinarian with the long black locks, Mr. Day. At the time of Mr. Edgeworth's arrival at Lichfield that erratic friend of his was engaged in what was perhaps the most remarkable of all his experiments in matrimony, that, namely, of "breeding up" — so the graceful phrase of the day ran — a couple of young girls, whom he had selected himself from a foundling hospital, with a view to finally marrying whichever of the two might prove to be the most worthy of that exalted privilege. Already one of them — Lucretia — had been discarded; but the second, Sabrina — names, it need hardly be said, of Mr. Day's own bestowing — was still on trial, although her prospects of happiness were being seriously menaced by the apparition of Miss Sneyd, whose steps were followed by a whole bevy of admiring suitors.

To readers of our belated age, the most interesting of these suitors will always be Major André, the

ill-fated victim of the American war of Independence, whose devotion to the fair Honora seems to have been as persistent as it was ill-requited. In place of labouring to repeat an oft-told tale, let me here indulge in a brief extract of the scene, by a pen which has never touched any subject of the kind without embellishing it: — "As one reads the old letters and memoirs, the echoes of laughter reach us. One can almost see the young folks all coming together out of the Cathedral close, where so much of their time was passed, the beautiful Honora, surrounded by friends and adorers, chaperoned by the graceful muse her senior, also much admired, and made much of. . . . So they passed on, happy and contented in each other's company, Honora in the midst, beautiful, stately, reserved; she too was one of those not destined to be old."

No, she was not destined to grow old; and either on that account, or owing to some more subtle attraction, even the broad comedy of Mr. Day's love-making, even Mr. Edgeworth's elaborate comments upon that love-making, fail to dissipate a certain impression of charm which hovers still about her name. That by all romantic precedent, the lover of her choice ought to have been, neither Mr. Day, whom she rejected, nor yet Mr. Edgeworth, whom she married, but Major André, will be clear to every reader of sentiment. Unfortunately such matters are, as he is aware, governed by no reasonable or ascertainable laws. Moreover, as between the man she married, and the man whom we consider that she ought to have married, we must remember that we are looking at both of them to-day in a monstrously unfair light. In the one case we see Major André in all the halo of an early and a tragic

death, a death so tragic that even the driest, the most hostile, of historians melts a little when he comes to speak of it. On the other hand, we mentally behold the excellent Mr. Edgeworth throned for another fifty years as the very type of the prosperous moralist; "giving his little senate laws," and crowned with a crown of indisputably well-deserved self-esteem. In the year 1770 all this was entirely different. The "young and gay philosopher," as his friends affectionately called him, was then only twenty-six years of age. As for his fascination, a short while before this date, he tells us himself that it was found absolutely necessary by his hostess to take an opportunity of publicly drinking *Mrs.* Edgeworth's health, in order to dissipate any unwarrantable hopes which might have arisen on his account. At what precise period he fell in love with Honora Sneyd, and how far, at this early stage of their acquaintance, she reciprocated that sentiment, we do not know, and in his own memoirs he is, for once, too discreet to inform us. All we know for certain is that it was upon the earnest expostulations of his austere-minded friend and quondam rival, Mr. Day, that he shortly afterwards left Lichfield, the two friends betaking themselves together to France, Mr. Edgeworth having under his charge his eldest child, and at that time only son, Richard, who was being brought up upon the strictest principles of the school of Rousseau.

CHAPTER III

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

Of Mr. Edgeworth's life in France a great deal is told in the memoir of him, but a great deal need not upon that account be repeated here. Everywhere, we are assured, he was enormously successful; everywhere he was courted, invited, and requested to prolong his stay. A lengthened account is given of his engineering feats in endeavouring to divert the course of the river Rhone, an attempt which seems unfortunately to have come to sudden grief during a wholly unlooked-for flood. To a modern reader the most entertaining part of his experiences will, perhaps, be found to be his meeting in Paris with Rousseau, whom he was anxious to consult upon the education of Richard Edgeworth, the younger. With the assistance of his own report, we can still picture to ourselves the luckless little lad being solemnly led up and introduced by his father, the "young and gay" philosopher, to the elder and more famous one, who then and there marched him off for a walk, by way of testing his character and general capabilities. It is impossible to read without a smile of the eminently unphilosophic wrath expressed by the sage, because each time that a handsome horse or vehicle passed them on their walk, his temporary

charge — a child of seven — invariably cried out, "That's an *English* horse!" "I am quite sure that's an *English* carriage!" — a view which he solemnly pronounced to be due to a sadly early "propensity to party prejudice," an explanation of the matter which, strange to say, the boy's father unhesitatingly and admiringly adopted.

The stay of the party in Paris was, however, a short one. It was at Lyons that all three settled down to remain for some time, and it was there that Mr. Day's calisthenic purgatory was so gallantly undergone. At Lyons Mr. Edgeworth was joined for a short time by his wife, but the French society which she found there did not, it is intimated, suit her, a fact which we can readily believe. She returned in any case to England for her expected confinement, and there, in Great Russell Street, as already stated, she died. When this event occurred, Mr. Edgeworth was still in France, but the news of it sent him flying back to England. How far relief was mingled with a certain amount of compunction we do not know, and are not told. All that we know for certain is that he was met by the faithful Day, who had preceded him to England by some months, and who now came a distance of several hundred miles expressly to tell him that Honora Sneyd, "although surrounded with lovers, was still her own mistress."

Upon this pregnant hint, Mr. Edgeworth at once acted. He hastened to Lichfield, where, by a most singular chance, he and Miss Sneyd met the very day of his arrival, at the house of Doctor Darwin. There was apparently no more hesitation upon her side than upon his own, and the result was that within

four months of his wife's death, in August 1773, they were married, by special licence, in the Ladies' Choir of the Cathedral of that town. What happened to the *ci-devant* pupil of Rousseau at this juncture of the family affairs we have no information. One very interesting point with regard to him Mr. Edgeworth, with his customary frankness, does reveal to us, which is that, as the result of these various experiments, the boy contracted so marked a loathing for education of every sort, that it was found impossible to induce him to learn anything, or even to remain at a school. It was a relief therefore to all concerned when he exhibited a willingness to go to sea. From the sea, to which he was then and there sent, he apparently drifted to America, where — to finish his adventures — he in due course of time married, and after a single visit to his family at Clifton, returned to America and died there; the only one of Mr. Edgeworth's many children to whom Edgeworthstown seems never at any time to have been a home.

The three little girls, on the other hand, were at once sent for from Great Russell Street, and seem to have received from Mrs. Honora Edgeworth the fullest motherly care, if also an occasional touch of that motherly austerity which was then regarded, not merely as becoming, but indispensable. That Mr. Edgeworth was sincerely devoted to his new wife, and that his second marriage was, unlike its predecessor, a thoroughly successful one, there can be no question. When, not many years later, the seeds of consumption, checked for a time, once more began to reveal themselves in the poor young woman, her husband at once left Ireland, and took her first to

Lichfield, to consult their friend Dr. Darwin, afterwards to a succession of temporary homes, in hopes that a drier climate, if it did not effect a cure, might at least cause some delay in the course of the disease.

Few efforts, perhaps, are more puzzling in this rather puzzling world than the effort to judge dispassionately of the strength of an emotion, when that emotion is expressed in language the reverse of anything we could ourselves even imagine using under similar circumstances. That, in spite of this hindrance, in spite of his elaborate rhetoric and stilted utterances, we are able to perceive that Mr. Edgeworth was genuinely fond of his wife, and genuinely sorry to lose her, must be set down to his credit. There are even one or two incidents recorded in his autobiography — such as the dropping of the wedding-ring from off her thin finger, and its falling with a light sound to the ground — which are quite the sort of incident which a man under the circumstances might note, and might afterwards recall. On the other hand, what are we to say with regard to the following letter, written to his daughter Maria, while he was actually sitting beside the poor young woman's dead body? Mr. Hare, in the *Life and Letters*, describes it as "a very touching letter." "Touching," like "elegant," "poetic," "gentlemanlike," and some other words, seems to mean absolutely different things to different minds. The only fair course, therefore, seems to be to give the letter itself, and to leave it to be judged. Here it is: —

"My dear Daughter, — At six o'clock on Thursday morning your excellent mother expired in my arms. She now lies dead beside me, and I know I am doing what would give her

pleasure, if she were capable of feeling anything, by writing to you at this time to fix her excellent image in your mind.

"As you grow older and become acquainted with more of my friends, you will hear from every mouth the most exalted character of your incomparable mother. You will be convinced by your own reflections on her conduct, that she fulfilled the part of a mother towards you and towards your sisters, without partiality towards her own, or servile indulgence towards mine. Her heart, conscious of rectitude, was above the fear of raising suspicions to her disadvantage in the mind of your father, or in the minds of your relations. . . .

"Continue, my dear daughter, the desire which you feel of becoming amiable, prudent, and of USE. The ornamental parts of a character with such an understanding as yours necessarily ensue; but true judgment and sagacity in the choice of friends, and the regulation of your behaviour, can be only had from reflection and from being thoroughly convinced of what experience teaches, in general too late, that to be happy we must be Good.

"God bless you, and make you ambitious of that valuable praise which the amiable character of your dear mother forces from the virtuous and the wise. My writing to you in my present situation will, my dearest daughter, be remembered by you as the strongest proof of the love of your approving and affectionate father,

RICHARD LOVELL EDGEWORTH."

What is one to say? *Are* such sentiments indeed touching? Is it even conceivable that a man should sit down under similar circumstances to write such a letter? — to indite, I ought to say, so truly monumental an epistle? There seems no course open to us but to hold up our hands in amazement, and to pass on to the next little incident in this strange, eventful history. That incident was the marriage of the sorrowing widower to the sister of the wife he had just lost — an arrangement which, he is careful to

assure us, had been earnestly pressed upon him by the latter herself.

A feeling of wonder, not unmixed with awe, is apt to steal over the mind of a modern reader as he studies these remarkable self-revelations on the part of a half-forgotten moralist. We of to-day are wont to accuse ourselves — perhaps one another — of a tendency to lay everything bare before an undiscriminating public; to, as it has been more picturesquely worded — "sell our souls for pence; just God, how few!" Yet even to-day, would it be so very easy to find a gentleman who would be candid enough to publish to the world that the lady whom he had decided to marry was upon the whole, of all her sisters, the one least pleasing to his taste, and that he himself is, he is aware, equally little attractive to her, but that they have made up their minds to marry, because the lamented sister of the one, and wife of the other, had advised that step? Such, in precise terms, is the explanation afforded to the public by Mr. Edgeworth, and the most remarkable part of the affair is, that the marriage so arranged seems to have been an unqualified success, if anything more successful than had been the preceding one. That, apart altogether from the sentimental side of the affair, there was also a legal one to be considered, is a fact which does not seem to have troubled any one, although the law as regards the marriage of a deceased wife's sister being the same then as now, one would have thought some little difficulty might have arisen on that score, especially with a landed property to be inherited. One clergyman, upon an explanation of the circumstances, seems to have shown some

little hesitation, and the marriage had in consequence to be for a while delayed. It came off, however, shortly afterwards, and, by way of a small crowning touch of oddity, upon Christmas Day, of all days in the year, at St. Andrew's Church, Holborn, "in the presence," so Mr. Edgeworth is careful to tell us, "of my first wife's brother, Mr. Elers, his lady, and Mr. Day."

That Mr. Day — the rejected suitor of both these Miss Sneyds — should have been present on that auspicious occasion seems to be only natural, and appropriate to the character of the whole proceeding. The friendship between him and Mr. Edgeworth had not, unfortunately, very much longer to run, the poor disciplinarian meeting his death a few years later, under what were at least singularly appropriate circumstances for a disciplinarian, namely, by his being flung from a young horse, which it was his innocent belief that he alone could subdue. Mr. Edgeworth brings his own record to an abrupt end in the middle of a sentence, about the time of his third marriage, and it was left to his daughter Maria to continue the history of the family, beginning with their arrival at Edgeworthstown, an event which took place in the summer of the year 1782.

Unlike the first arrival, this second descent of the family upon its ancestral home proved to be an event of no temporary or provisional character. On the contrary, Mr. Edgeworth arrived on this occasion preceded or accompanied, in true patriarchal fashion, by menservants and by maidservants, by a brand-new wife, by two quite separate sets of children by two previous wives, and — a detail which even the patriarchs

themselves do not seem to have found necessary — his circle was further enlarged by two unmarried sisters of his late and of his present wife, two Miss Sneyds, who from that time forward until after his own death, thirty-five years later, were to find their permanent home under his roof.

Such a circumstance may be taken, I think, unhesitatingly as a testimony of the amiability of all concerned, and not least for that of the master of the house himself. In sober truth, Mr. Edgeworth was precisely one of those men whose qualities show their best and most glowing side to the devotees inside their own family, and only become perceptibly spotted with absurdity when confronted by the gaze of a colder and a more critical outside circle. An autocrat he was, and had every intention of being. Wives, sisters-in-law, daughters, tenants, and the like, were all regarded by him as so many satellites, revolving gently, as by a law of nature, around the pedestal upon which he stood alone, in a graceful or commanding attitude. This point conceded, everything else, however, went delightfully, and a more benevolent embodiment of the principle of autocracy has perhaps never flourished since that institution was introduced upon a much-ruled planet.

It was the very benevolence of this autocratic standpoint which made it impossible for him to believe that any one belonging to him — especially a mere daughter, a member of the less important half of his enormous brood — could fail to be the better for carrying on her little pursuits under his direct eye, and subject in every detail to his approval or disapproval. That he was in essentials one of the best-intentioned of fathers is

certain, yet few bad, few merely indifferent fathers, have inflicted upon a gifted son or daughter worse injuries, from an intellectual point of view, than he did. He not merely accentuated, he actually lifted into the light of a solemn duty, what was by nature the most serious of Maria Edgeworth's mental failings — a lack, namely, of imagination, one which under his fostering care grew and swelled, until it amounted to something very like a kindly and tolerant contempt for everything which that word conveys.

This, far more than any actual interference with the text of her books, is what arouses the wrath of her admirers, and constitutes the least forgivable of his misdoings as a father. Everything else — even the amazing prefaces, which were, after all, removable, and have, I believe, disappeared from all the later editions; even the deification of the great goddess Utility, and the chanting, in season and out of season, of her arid and scraggy perfections; even the "Fe Fo Fum" objurgations, hurled like brickbats at poor "Puss-in-Boots" and "Jack and the Beanstalk" — all these, and any number of similar peccadilloes, might have been forgiven, if only he would have consented, in the good old nursery phrase, "to keep hisself to hisself." It was his inability apparently to do so which constituted the worst of his indiscretions, and which brings upon him the wrath of the few — for few, I fear, they must nowadays be reckoned — who cherish towards Maria Edgeworth herself something approaching to a genuine enthusiasm.

The harm undoubtedly came chiefly from the mere superabundance of his energy and activity. To such a degree did these qualities overflow in him, that what-

ever was being said or done, above all whatever was being written, it was absolutely indispensable that he should be in the thick of it, if not as principal, at least as arbitrator and general overseer. "Edgeworth must write, or he would *burst!*" was said of him by a contemporary. No one would have desired so painful a domestic catastrophe, and all that could have been wished is that it might have been able to be suggested to him by some prudent bystander that he should write his own books in his own dignified fashion, and should allow his daughter to carry out her own little ideas in such a manner, and with such aims, as benevolent nature might suggest.

Whenever, even for a time, she escaped from his influence, any discriminating eye can perceive the difference at once. We have Mrs. Barbauld's positive assurance that *Castle Rackrent* was written entirely without his advice or supervision, and even without such an assurance, its intrinsic qualities would have convinced us of the fact. A still clearer case is afforded by the letters. Those written familiarly — especially those addressed by Miss Edgeworth to her aunt or to her cousin, Sophy Ruxton — letters written obviously at top-speed, and without a thought of preservation, far less of publication, — are, to my mind, amongst the best of their kind we possess, perhaps the very best merely descriptive letters ever written by a woman in English. On the other hand, the moment she had anything to write which seemed to require consideration — anything which for some reason clogged her pen — it is curious to note how instantly, as if under compulsion, she reverted to the elaborately complimentary style, to the brobdingnagian phraseology of her father's

best and most superior Johnsonese. Having already afforded the reader an opportunity of studying one letter of Mr. Edgeworth's, I feel certain that he must desire to see another. The following — written a few days after the foregoing letter to his daughter — will serve to show how the same domestic affliction would be treated by a dignified moralist when addressing the outside world. It occurs in an unpublished letter from Mr. Wedgwood to Dr. Darwin, which I have been kindly allowed to use, and the allusion to Mr. Edgeworth runs as follows: —

"Upon Tuesday I had a letter from Mr. Edgeworth, addressed to W. and B.,[1] which he begins by saying — 'One circumstance, and only one, in our connection is disagreeable to me, which is that I am restrained from having things of Etrurian manufacture, because I am not treated in two different characters, as a stranger and a friend. Let me address this letter to the firm of W. and B.,[1] to ask whether I can have twelve profiles of my dear Mrs. Edgeworth, done in white or pale blue, from a profile by Mrs. Harrington, and an excellent picture by Smart — I lost her Sunday — and you both know she is a real loss to, — your friend,

RICHARD LOVELL EDGEWORTH.'"

Such a letter cannot fail to please! The following extracts are from two other letters of Mr. Edgeworth, written about eleven years later. The "Mr. Ruxton" so ceremoniously addressed, it may be as well to explain, was the writer's brother-in-law: —

R. L. Edgeworth to Mr. Ruxton.

"PRINCE'S BUILDINGS, CLIFTON.

"MY DEAR MR. RUXTON, — I am impatient to thank you for your great kindness to my young people, and for your

[1] Firm of Westwood and Bentley, Etruria.

sincere and friendly offers of assistance in their journey. I do assure you that there is nobody now in the world from whom I am more willing to receive obligations, or in whose prudence and activity I have more confidence. When life begins to move distinctly downwards, it gives me the greatest present pleasure, and the most certain hopes of future satisfaction, to perceive that the husband of my beloved sister becomes every day more united to me. . . .

"I thank you for the kind manner in which you informed us of the death of poor Thomas: my sister's letters had led us to expect it. Mrs. Day also died suddenly the twenty-first of last month, a few days after she left us. There does not, now that little Thomas is gone, exist even a person of the same name as Mr. Day. Our poor little boy enjoyed all the pleasures of which his short and infant existence was capable. From Sophy he had indulgence, attention, and amusement, and during his painful illness all the tenderness and care of your excellent wife. My compassion and solicitude for them was not less than for the child; but I hope that the remembrance of their own goodness will soon obliterate the painful impressions of his miserable end," etc. etc.

Poor little "Thomas Day"! It is difficult to resist a momentary sensation of pity for so evidently unnecessary a little item, whose exit from a well-filled planet evoked such remarkably tepid demonstrations of regret on the part of his dignified and sonorous parent. That Mr. Edgeworth may have been wiser in the matter than the more sympathetic aunts and sisters is, however, conceivable. At all events, before condemning him, we must take into consideration the somewhat exceptional nature of his position, seeing that few of us are privileged to enter quite accurately into the sensations of a man who, if he has just lost one small son, has still the consciousness of being the happy father of some fourteen or fifteen

living children. The views of the patriarchs have in this respect never been revealed in all their fulness, else we might find that even those unequalled fosterers of the primal affections were in the habit of accepting incidents of the kind when occurring in their own families, with something of the stoicism born of habit!

CHAPTER IV

ARRIVAL IN IRELAND — FIRST BOOKS

We have now reached what — at any rate to Irish readers — will always be a very interesting point in Maria Edgeworth's life, her arrival, namely, in Ireland in the year 1782, from which date, with the exception of a good many visits, one stay at Clifton, and two rather lengthened sojourns on the continent, she may be said to have practically never left it again.

Even those to whom the ground is fairly familiar will find a considerable difficulty in picturing accurately to themselves Irish social life as it existed towards the end of the eighteenth century. Three enormously important events — the Rebellion of '98, the Union, and the Famine — lie between it and us; all three of these having a marked, and all three in several respects a very disastrous, effect upon that social life. Of those three events the Famine was immeasurably the most revolutionary in its results. The Rebellion, although it wrote itself in blood and horror across a considerable part of the country, would in all probability not have had any very lengthened influence, but for the fact that the memory of it has ever since served as a political rallying-point. When once the panic aroused on one side, when once the bitter resentment which its suppression awoke on the other,

had died down, matters would—in fact to a great degree did—resume their wonted course. The Union again, although a much more important event, chiefly affected the upper classes, and the well-to-do citizens of Dublin. It stands before us at the present date rather as a great political, than as a great natural landmark. In spite of the inevitable changes which such a shifting of the seat of government brought about; in spite of what may be called the unnatural increase of population which occurred in the next forty years; in spite of O'Connell and Catholic emancipation; in spite of everything and everybody, up to the time of the great Famine the broad features of Ireland, and of Irish social life, had remained unchanged. When, further on in this book, the reader arrives at the letters of Miss Edgeworth which describe the country of the Martins in Connemara —letters written not many years before that event—he will be able to judge how vast the chasm is which lies between what is there described, and anything which is even remotely conceivable as existing in Ireland at the present time. Compared to such patriarchal chieftains as the Martins of Ballinahinch, the Edgeworths of Edgeworthstown were, of course, small fry. Even there, however—in fact all over the country—the same social tone, the same general ideas of life prevailed. Once settled down in his ancestral dominions, Mr. Edgeworth found himself in what to him must have seemed the very appropriate position of a little local king. Like such a petty monarch he had his levées, his courtiers, his retainers, —more or less ragged:—like such an one he held his courts of justice, and distributed rewards and punish-

ments—at any rate of a minor kind—pretty much according to his own ideas of justice or expediency.

Being, as has been seen, a despot, and a benevolent one, the arrangement worked admirably. Nothing can be more harmonious than the picture which comes before us, as we look back from our vantage-ground of over a hundred years, and see that large, variously assorted family party gathered together at Edgeworthstown, during the years which followed their arrival in 1782. Like the majority of Irish residences, the house itself belongs to that rather nondescript type of architecture which depends for its escape from absolute ugliness mainly upon the taste and intelligence of its immediate owners. A wilderness of neglected garden and shrubbery surrounded it at the date of their arrival, which became gradually subdued into order as time went on. In later years Maria Edgeworth was herself the chief gardener, and was, moreover, a keen and practical one, in days when the variety was very much rarer than it has since become. This, however, was long afterwards, and at the date I am speaking of she simply took her share in the various duties, large and small, which fell to the lot of the different members of so multifarious a group of people.

To a good many girls of her age, the mere size of that ever-growing family — whose numbers are to a biographer, I confess, baffling — would have been no small trial. Not so to Maria Edgeworth. Children were for her, all through her long life, not merely no trouble, but a stimulus, a rest, and an amusement. It was only the peremptory orders of her father and stepmother which hindered her from converting herself

into the play-fellow, slave, and maid-of-all-work of her well-nigh countless younger brothers and sisters. One small boy (Henry by name) was made over from the first to her especial care, and retained until his death a particular niche in her large and loving heart. It was for his benefit, and for the benefit of those who came nearest to him in age, that her earliest children's tales were composed — a point to which I shall have to return presently.

It is a curious fact that from the first, and while she was still in years a mere school-girl, her father seems to have associated her with all his own work at Edgeworthstown. She rode her cob or pony "Dapple" beside him, when he went his rounds; she kept the accounts of the whole expenditure under his directions; she even seems to have acted for him as a sort of clerk or sub-agent. Thirty years later, the critic of the *Quarterly*, wishing to make himself particularly unpleasant, asserted roundly that she had been in the habit of hiding in her father's magistrates' room "for the purpose of taking notes of the peculiar manners or expressions of the litigants." If she did so, the sin would not have struck most of us as great, but there is no reason for supposing that she did anything of the kind. There are people — *pace* the Quarterly Reviewer — who are able to see, hear, and perceive, without hiding themselves for the purpose, or even listening behind keyholes!

That this early acquaintance with life at first-hand was of immense advantage to her as a novelist there can be no question. It freed her from that rather cramping atmosphere of minute preoccupations which is apt to surround very young girls. Further than

this, it brought her into genuine, and not merely into artificial, relations with the tenants and the peasant class generally — a benefit which it is difficult to overestimate.

That she had sustained no slight loss in having spent the irrecoverable years of childhood and early youth in what were not the scenes she was destined to commemorate, I have already stated to be my opinion. This is a point upon which I am so clearly at variance with her previous biographers, that it evidently is one which admits of considerable divergence of opinion. Mr. Hare lays stress upon the great advantage Maria Edgeworth enjoyed in being able to study the country with what were comparatively mature eyes. "Maria was now," he says, "fifteen, and was old enough therefore to be interested in all the peculiarities of the Irish, as contrasted with the English character." In the earlier *Life* Miss Zimmern is even more emphatic: — "It was her [Maria's] good fortune and ours," she says, "that at an age when the mind is most impressionable she came into these novel scenes, in lieu of having lived in their midst from childhood, when it is unlikely that she would so well have seized their salient traits."

It may be so. The point is not in any case one upon which to dogmatise. To have had the right, so to speak, to a childhood in an Irish country home, and to have been — also, so to speak — defrauded of that right; to have had to spend the chief — it is hardly an exaggeration to say, the *only* years of true impressionability in Great Russell Street, in Derby, in Lichfield, and Upper Wimpole Street, seems to me, I will confess, for the early years of an Irish romancer, a state of affairs

almost too regrettable to contemplate. If now and then, even in the best of Miss Edgeworth's books, a certain sense of unreality presents itself; if now and then a momentary haze of falsity seems to float between an Irish reader and the page, it is, I think, only fair that we should set down such passing slips largely to the fact that she came to the country which she is undertaking to describe almost as a grown-up woman.

That she lost no time when she did arrive is at least certain. Eyes and ears were alike employed, and to the best possible purpose. Long afterwards, in a letter to a correspondent, she entered to an unusual degree into an explanation of the method — or possibly absence of method — which enabled her to place herself at a point of view so extravagantly remote from her own as always to awaken astonishment that she should so nearly have attained it as she did. This is a point which had better, however, be reserved till we are considering her Irish books, especially the best of them, *Castle Rackrent* — the best Irish novel or story, in the present writer's opinion, which has as yet seen the light.

Nearly a dozen years were to pass after Miss Edgeworth's arrival at Edgeworthstown before she began, even tentatively, to try her hand at an Irish tale. Her first literary efforts were in quite a different direction, partly as her father's assistant — a sort of acolyte under him at the shrine of the great goddess Utility — partly on her own initiative, with the first of that long array of children's tales which, if far from constituting her chief claims to recognition as a writer, at least carried her fame at the date in which they were written further

than it has always been the lot of even the highest achievements of genius to carry their creator's fame. Taking her writings categorically, we find the first of them — begun when she was little over sixteen years of age — to have been a translation of Madame de Genlis's *Adèle et Théodore*. This translation was never apparently finished, Mr. Holcroft, a novelist of that date, having been found to be engaged upon the same task, although, since we hear of its being presented by Mr. Edgeworth to the illustrious author of the original, it must have got into some more or less presentable form. The next of her writings — also undertaken at her father's orders — finally appeared under the title of *Letters to Literary Ladies*, and is a conscientious little bit of task-work, setting forth the advantages of a mild amount of cultivation as applied to the "female" mind. About the same time Mr. Edgeworth began the earlier chapters of what eventually grew into two substantial volumes as *Practical Education*, a work in which his daughter's share was avowedly that of assistant and collaborator only. By way of popularising the views therein expressed, and possibly as a relaxation from the labour it entailed, she began to amuse herself by writing down a succession of little children's stories, which were eventually collected under the formidable — to a child, the absolutely incomprehensible — title of *The Parent's Assistant*.

These tales, and the yet more elementary ones which were afterwards published as *Early Lessons*, were begun without any idea of publication, simply for the benefit, as has been said, of her particular charge "little Henry," and of such of the small brothers and sisters

as came nearest to him in age. They were written out upon a schoolroom slate; were altered; were added to; were approved of, or summarily contemned, entirely according to the verdict of her short-petticoated judges. To say that the latter were safer critics than her redoubtable father is certainly not to assert too much! Moreover, that the stories themselves owe their really extraordinary vitality largely to this method of production we cannot doubt. They are stories for children, written, not from above, but from a level; from the point of view of those to whom they were addressed. If we take up one of these little fat volumes in its earliest and most attractive form, and try to conceive of it as proceeding directly from a child — a somewhat over-drilled and over-virtuous child, such as it was the tendency of that disciplinary age to produce — we shall readily perceive that, with its hard and fast distribution of rewards and punishments; its resolute hold upon concrete fact; its avoidance, not to say detestation, of anything approaching the abstract; it is precisely what such a Georgian or pre-Victorian child might — nay, certainly would — have written for itself, had its powers of composition been equal to such a task.

For — let cynics say what they will to the contrary — children unquestionably *do* prefer that the rewards and the punishments should go straight; that the nice kind boy should have his cakes and his pony; that the bad, cruel boy should be severely bitten, and have a sound whipping — if possible administered by themselves as Rhadamanthus. They even enjoy, perhaps as a variety, the sensation of being now and then good

themselves. Certainly R. L. Stevenson thought so, and there could hardly be a better judge of children. If we open his *Child's Garden of Verses*, and turn to any of the rhymes which are put into the mouths of children, we shall find that the sentiments therein expressed are, with hardly an exception, of the most irreproachably virtuous cast.

At all events, and without prejudging the case as regards children in general, there can be no question that the Edgeworth children were not only remarkably virtuous themselves, but preferred that their youthful heroes and heroines should be virtuous also. "I do not think one tear per month is shed in this house," Mr. Edgeworth boasted in a letter to his friend Dr. Darwin. How far so desirable a state of things was entirely due to the admirable system inaugurated by himself, or how far kindly Nature had her share in it, we cannot now know, so the credit had better be divided between them. Turning from these children of fact, long since grown grey and vanished, to those more enduring children of fancy, who were the offspring, not of himself, but of his daughter Maria, personal experience points to the fact that it is the most infantile of them all that has retained the greatest vitality, and equally so whether beloved in the first instance, or the reverse. For personally — and in all these higher altitudes of literature, the personal attitude is admittedly the *only* one — I will confess to having throughout my own youth nourished a rooted antipathy to "Frank"! From the moment in which some kindly voice began to read aloud the chronicle of his virtues, and while the page upon which those virtues were inscribed was still an undecipherable mystery,

that antipathy began, and must, I imagine, have increased daily: —

"There was a little boy whose name was Frank. . . . When his father or mother said to him, 'Frank, shut the door,' he ran directly and shut the door. When they said to him, 'Frank, do not touch that knife,' he took his hands away from the knife, and did not touch it. He was an obedient little boy."

Even such recitations of his merits might, I think, have been endured, had it not been for his own eternal endorsement of them: — "Mamma, *I* am useful, *I* am of *great* use." "Papa, *I* never meddle with candles or fire when you or mamma are not in the room." "Mamma, I never touch *anything* that does not belong to *me*." "Mamma, I will *always* ask you about everything, because you can tell whether things are good for me or not."

The italics, it must be clearly understood, were in the voice, and will not be found upon the printed page, but the effect was such as I have described. And the worst of the matter was that, not alone obedience — never, after all, a particularly popular virtue — but even kindliness to animals, even common honesty, became equally unpopular when taken under the pragmatical shelter of Frank: — "Mamma, I am going to behave to this snail as I should wish to be behaved to myself if *I* were a snail." "Mamma, I was very *honest*, was I not, when I returned his nuts to him?" "Mamma, I will always be honest about *everything* as well as about *nuts*." There were moments when it seemed hardly possible that any mother of spirit would not have risen up and slain such a boy!

On the other hand, Rosamund was always a much

beloved little girl, and even her ghost — poor, dim little ghost! — is beloved still. She and Frank may be called the hero and heroine of these infant tales, although, to the best of my recollection, they never actually met in the course of them. In Rosamund's case, all that vehement wrath which had been previously aroused by Frank, was reserved for her unnatural parents. In the first of the series, we learn how poor little Rosamund was kept for a whole month by her mother in shoes which hurt her dreadfully, entirely too for moral, and not in the least for pecuniary reasons. The tale, as I have recently ascertained, is really quite a brief one, but in those days that I have been recalling, it seemed as if the woes and the endurance of Rosamund had been drawn out to the length of an entire *Odyssey!* If the reader will kindly study the following recital, and will then please to imagine it being listened to, or spelled out for itself, by a very small child, he will rapidly begin, I think, to realise it from the proper standpoint: —

"Every day her shoes grew worse and worse, till at last she could neither run, dance, jump, nor walk in them. Whenever Rosamund was called to see anything, she was pulling her shoes up at the heel, and was sure to be too late. Whenever her mother was going out to walk, she could not take Rosamund with her, for Rosamund had no soles to her shoes. At length, on the very last day of the month, it happened that her father proposed to take her with her brother to a glass-house, which she had long wished to see. She was very happy. But when she was quite ready, had her hat and gloves on, and was making haste downstairs to her brother and her father, who were waiting at the hall-door for her, the shoe dropped off. She put it on again in a hurry, but as she was going across the hall, her father turned round. 'Why, are

you walking slipshod? No one must walk slipshod with me! Why, Rosamund,' said he, looking at her shoes with disgust, 'I thought that you were always neat? Go, I cannot take you with me.'"

If at this climax of her sorrows poor Rosamund "retired and burst into tears," it is hardly to be wondered at; indeed, but for pure wrath, I suspect that the listener would have done so likewise! It was the abominable and the perfectly well understood hypocrisy of the whole affair which aroused such furious resentment, this business of the glass-house having evidently been concocted between the parents wholly with a view to the moral benefit to be derived. A little earlier in the same tale, we find the following conversation between Rosamund and her mother. The Purple Jar has arrived — that fatal Jar, which Rosamund had preferred to her new shoes, and this is what happens: —

"The moment it was set down upon the table, Rosamund ran up, with an exclamation of joy: 'I may have it now, mamma?'

"'Yes, my dear, it is yours.' Rosamund poured the flowers from her lap upon the carpet, and seized the purple flower-pot.

"'Oh, dear mother!' cried she, as soon as she had taken off the top, but there's something dark in it; it smells very disagreeably; what is it? I didn't want this black stuff.'

"'Nor I neither, my dear.'

"'But what shall I do with it, mamma?'

"'That I cannot tell.'

"'But it will be of no use to me, mamma?'

"'That I cannot help.'

"'But I must pour it out, and fill the flower-pot with water.'

"'That's as you please, my dear.'

"'Will you lend me a bowl to pour it into, mamma?'

"'That was more than I promised you, my dear; but I will lend you a bowl.'"

The climax is soon reached, and poor Rosamund's despair and disappointment are known to us all! In vain she now implores for a reversal of her rash choice, and for a bestowal upon her of the uninteresting but useful shoes. The maternal Minos is not to be appeased, and the appointed month of penance has duly to be endured: —

"'No, Rosamund, you must abide by your own choice; and now the best thing is, to bear your disappointment with good humour.'

"'I will bear it as well as I can,' said Rosamund, wiping her eyes; and she began slowly and sorrowfully to fill the vase with flowers."

Breathes there a child with soul so dead, that would not to itself have said — "I hate, I simply *detest* that mother of Rosamund!" That this was not the impression intended to be conveyed is, however, perfectly certain, which only shows how careful even the cleverest of us ought to be, especially if we cherish a hope of our little inventions reaching — as in this case — to a second, nay, even to a third and a fourth generation. In those remote days which I have been trying to recall, a good deal of the wrath evoked by the virtues of Frank, and by the woes of Rosamund, rebounded, I feel quite certain, upon the head of their creator. In more recent years it has been realised that, whereas Maria Edgeworth herself served as the model of the delinquent Rosamund, in the glorified Frank we are privileged to behold no less an incarnation

than the youthful presentment of her illustrious papa — a view which certainly causes the matter to assume a somewhat different aspect.

Rosamund and Frank both reappear in the later stories, Frank always as the same embodiment of conscious virtue, Rosamund invariably in the same attitude of a rash but affectionate penitent. In the latest of the collected editions of our author's works, *The Parent's Assistant*, like the rest of the series, has had the great advantage of being edited by Mrs. Richmond Ritchie, whose prefaces abound in the happiest touches. "Fairies," she observes, in one place, "are not much in Miss Edgeworth's line, but philanthropic manufacturers, liberal noblemen, and benevolent ladies in travelling carriages, do as well, and appear at the nick of time, to distribute rewards, or to point a moral." Too true! neither the Edgeworth children themselves, in flesh and blood, nor their representatives in the stories, were ever allowed to have anything to do with fairies, and one only wonders how, under the circumstances, they contrived to hold up their heads, and to look as lively as they did. Lively, indeed, all Miss Edgeworth's heroes and heroines are, or they never would have retained their hold upon at least two generations of critical readers. Of the fairly long list of these heroes and heroines of hers, none are sprightlier or more alive than the very youngest of them. The little group of children in *The Orphans;* Jim and his Lightfoot; *Lazy Lawrence;* Maurice and Arthur, in *Forgive and Forget;* the other two boys in *Waste not, Want not* — all these look up in our faces with an aspect of credibility which I fail myself always to feel with the same certainty as regards

the older personages — the Irish ones always excepted. As for *Simple Susan*, that small damsel sits — must, while literature lasts, continue to sit — upon the pedestal raised for her by the great and good Sir Walter. "When the boy brings back the lamb to the little girl," Sir Walter Scott wrote to a correspondent, "there is nothing for it but to put down the book and cry." And after such a tribute every later and lower panegyric sinks necessarily to the level of mere surplusage!

CHAPTER V

DISTURBED DAYS

The even flow of life at Edgeworthstown — a flow which to impatient readers of less placid days seems at times exasperatingly even — was destined to be somewhat seriously troubled during the last ten years of the eighteenth century, and by two quite disconnected sources of disturbance. One of these was external, namely "the State of the Country," the other was internal, and resolved itself mainly into a question of health. A grievous heritage of consumption had come into the family from the Sneyd alliances, all the children of the two wives bearing that name having been at one time or other threatened or struck down with the scourge. The first to be so struck down was a girl named Honora, daughter of the original Honora, and described as being even more beautiful than her mother. Strangers on coming up to speak to some member of the family were so struck by her beauty as to be unable, we are assured, to remember what they were about to say. It is likely enough, since it was a beauty, no doubt, of that dazzling type which the scourge, not only encourages, but sometimes seems almost to create. She died at all events while still under sixteen years of age, to the immense grief of her relations, especially

of her eldest sister. Another child, Lovell, the only son of the second marriage, was threatened with the same fate, and under the panic of the visitation it was decided in the year 1791 to break up house for a while at Edgeworthstown, and to carry the boy to Clifton — a town in those days boasting of a reputation as a health resort, which it seems in our own to have quite lost.

The task of conveying the younger members of the flock was left to their sister Maria, the father and mother having hurried off at once with the invalid. It was no light undertaking, as will readily be perceived when we consider the size of that enormous family party, the indifferent travelling arrangements attainable, and the distance, little now, but how formidable then!

Several as yet unpublished letters of Miss Edgeworth belong to this period, and will tell their own tale infinitely better than it can be told by any other means. One little incident of the road may be mentioned first, since it occurs, not in her letters, but in Mrs. Edgeworth's memoir. Upon the arrival of the whole party at some inn in which they were to spend the night, we are told that the hostess of it, seeing child after child descend from the coach, and parcel after parcel handed out in an apparently endless succession, at last exclaimed indignantly: "Haven't yez brought the kitchen grates with you too?"

Characteristically enough, this first letter of Maria Edgeworth begins with a loan, or a gift, which is to be accepted by the recipient entirely as a kindness to the donor herself. It is addressed to her cousin,

Sophy Ruxton, daughter of the Mrs. Ruxton who was Maria's best-beloved aunt, as well as faithful, lifelong correspondent: —

"My dear Sophy, — I must, and I will, find time to write one line to you. . . . I hope Tomboy will deliver this with his own hand. How very good you are to take charge of him. He has orders to lay, if he can lift it, a clumsy writing-desk of sister Maria's at your ladyship's feet. Don't let your pride prick up its ears; I am not going to give it to you, I am only going to beseech you to take care of it in my absence, and if you will, dear Sophy, it will be very agreeable to me to think it may sometimes bring me to your thoughts. . . . Wherever I am, I shall always feel as I do now, that a very great proportion of the happiness of my life must depend upon the approbation and affection of the friends I love. I send the story I began for Margaret, merely to prove to you that I had actually begun. It is very badly done, and for my own credit I would not send it, only on the faith that you will not show it to anybody, and return it by Molly."

The next extract is also from a letter written a few months later, to the same cousin Sophy: —

"Clifton, *March* 9, 1792.

"Mr. Seymour, Mrs. Danby's father, is coming to live very near us in Prince's Place; I saw him for a moment, at Miss Place's. Before I have done with Miss Place, I must tell you an anecdote she told us. A very cross, ignorant old lady lodges with a very literary lady. And one day the literary lady had been conversing with some of her companions about Tasso,

and forgot the old lady was in the room ; the old lady fidgeted, hemmed, stirred the fire, sat down, got up, and giving as much expression as she could to her hips as she crossed the room, fairly flounced out. Presently a visitor after her own heart knocked at the door ; she reappeared : 'Oh dear, ma'am!' cried she, 'I am so glad you 've come, for here 's Mrs. Q. and Mrs. Z. have been talking till I am quite sick of Tarso, and all those *leather-backed gentlemen !*' "

After this letter there comes a sudden break. The stay of the family at Clifton was nearing an end, and the next set of letters is dated from Edgeworthstown. Events in Ireland were fast becoming threatening. One or two scares about French descents had roused the authorities into acts of repression, the result of which had been to add fuel to the flames. To all who knew that country it was clear that an outbreak was impending, and equally clear that county Longford — and consequently Edgeworthstown — were likely to be in the thick of it. To many men this would have seemed to be an excellent reason, if not for staying away himself, at least for not bringing home with him to Ireland a delicate wife and a crowd of tiny children ! Mr. Edgeworth, however, thought otherwise. To be at Edgeworthstown was, he considered, under the circumstances, his duty, and where he was there his wife and all his family had to be also. Home to Edgeworthstown accordingly the entire party trooped. Of the return journey we are not given any details, but, since it was under the control of the dignified head of the house, it is probable that all went smoothly. No sooner were

they settled down again at home than Maria's active pen began to get to work. The stories were now accumulating fast, and would shortly form a volume. *Practical Education* was also being pushed forward by Mr. Edgeworth, in the intervals of his duties not only as a magistrate but also as holding some command in a troop of local yeomanry. What is to us to-day of considerably greater interest, Maria began at once to collect the materials which grew into that wonderful little page of social history, torn direct from life, that was destined to appear anonymously as *Castle Rackrent.*

These years of revolution and disturbance seem to have had an undoubtedly stimulating effect upon her mental development. Not only was the best of all her books projected then, but even the letters written after this date are distinctly stronger and better than the earlier ones. The following, hitherto unpublished, description of an encounter which took place before their own hall-door is too good to omit, or even to curtail. The whole scene — the perplexity of the English footman; the importance of little Mackin, the newly-enlisted militiaman, in whom "none could dare to see the car-driver through the regimentals"; the ladies crowding the bow-window to look on; the dignified magistrate, helplessly endeavouring to enforce the law; the wild defiance, and final escape of the culprit — it might all have come bodily out of one of her Irish novels.

"Edgeworthstown, *Sept.* 20, 1794.

"My dearest Aunt Ruxton, — Do you remember an old shoemaker who used to wear a broad black

collar round his neck, and who always looked as if he was going to be hanged? This man, known by the name of 'Old Moor,' has a son called by the name of 'Young Moor.' He is not, however, the captain of a band of robbers, nor yet a hero; but he has made himself a sergeant, and in this character, with all his red, blue, green, and yellow *un*blushing military honours, he made his appearance in a conspicuous seat at church on Sunday, to the admiration and amusement of a respectable and devout congregation. This morning my father came down to breakfast early, with the intention of being at Longford to attend a secret Committee, and was drinking his chocolate, and talking to Lovell about the composition of certain white lights, when Samuel came in with — 'Sir, here are some soldiers, a whole parcel on 'em, Sir, who have had a brawl, if you 'd please to see 'em, Sir. I believe they have enlisted my lord's painter.'

"'My lord's painter!' said my father; 'What is his name?'

"'My lord's painter, Sir, — he as painted my Lord Granard's house, he is at the door.'

"Upon inquiry my father found that 'my lord's painter' was a poor old grey-headed man, who had been made drunk by one Mott Farrell, a man of very bad character in this town, who had first forced a guinea into his pocket, and then robbed him of it, and then insisted upon his being duly enlisted in his Majesty's service. The soldier who presented the poor painter, with his bundle of brushes still tied up in a handkerchief, was little Mackin, who not many weeks ago was a car-driver in his honour's service. But he drew on and off his gloves with so fine an air; called my father

'my dear,' and talked so confidently of his knowing 'too much of military service,' etc., that none could dare to see the car-driver through the regimentals. In spite, however, of little Mackin the quondam car-driver's knowledge of military affairs, my father could not be persuaded that the painter was duly enlisted, and he discharged him.

"A few minutes after, when we thought that the painter and his brushes were at liberty, Samuel re-entered with poached eyes. 'Sir, they have seized my lord's painter again, and are forcing him into a house in the town!' My father waxed wrath at this piece of tyranny, and went to enforce justice. Now the person who had seized the painter after his discharge was Sergeant Harry Moor. He made his appearance with a constable, — half yellow wig, half black hair, — Charlie Monaghan, no less, the husband of the celebrated washerwoman. They stood opposite the library window; my father, at the door of the new hall, was reading to the painter his examinations, the ladies were crowding round the bow-window, when lo! they saw Young Moor draw and 'brandish high th' Hibernian sword!' Charlie Monaghan, with a stick in his hand, beat, or seemed to beat, at his coat, but Charlie Monaghan was not a hero, and Young Moor escaped from the arm of the law, and ran off to fight another day. All this passed like a flash of lightning: there was no thunder! My father did not see the flash of the sword, and when he looked up, it was over.

"A warrant was immediately made out to conduct the hero to gaol for a contempt of his Majesty's justices. The constable, and John Langan, and Mr.

Lovell Edgeworth went to seize Harry at his castle, whither he had taken refuge. They were to go to the back entrance of the said castle. My father got into his chaise, which was waiting for him to go to Longford, and meant to do himself the honour of receiving Sergeant Moor as he went through the town. In the middle of the street stood the undaunted hero. My father, confident that his emissaries were at the back premises, thought he had the gentleman safe; but the moment he heard my father give orders to a soldier to seize him, he darted into his house. Now, by some mistake, Monaghan was not ready at the back door, and Moor escaped. My father, however, knowing that a sergeant was a man of too much consequence to be entirely lost, determined to send kind inquiries after him to his commanding officer, and so pursued his way to Longford, with *Turnor on Crimes and Punishments* in the chaise with him."

Turnor on Crimes and Punishments must have been a work in considerable demand, one conceives, just then in Ireland! Hardly a week passed without somewhat similar excursions and alarms, and, as may be seen from the foregoing account, the newly enlisted militia were quite as likely to prove breakers of the law as any of the more officially recognised "rebels," whom it was supposed to be their business to control. Another fragment of a letter is extant, which apparently told of the capture of this hero, "Young Moor." Unfortunately it is only a fragment, and the end of that particular tale will therefore never now be known:—

"About half past five o'clock my father returned,

looking extremely tired, and, to our surprise, quite hoarse. 'After I have eaten something, for I have eaten nothing since morning,' said he, 'I will tell you my adventures.' Dinner was soon over, and we drew round the sofa to hear. 'I was reading in the chaise when the stage coach passed me full drive, its driver drunk as usual. I was withdrawing my eyes from this ugly spectacle, when I saw that one of the wheels of the coach was just coming off. I called to the coachman, but he did not heed. As we came up, the coachman whipped his horses into a gallop, and I called and called, till I was so hoarse I could call no more, — in vain, till a jolt came, and crash . . .' "

And with the like crash our tale comes to an end, for the rest of this letter is lost, and we know no further. We leave off, however, with a lively impression of what was likely to befall passengers in a closed coach with a drunken driver. The end of the adventure seems to have been that the coach was overturned, and that "Young Moor," who was upon the top of it, was then and there duly captured.

CHAPTER VI

NINETY-EIGHT

The gloom, which was at this date fast settling down over Ireland in general, was accentuated at Edgeworthstown by fresh trouble. Mrs. Edgeworth was visibly failing. After her return from Clifton she began to be ill, and it soon became clear that her life could not be much further prolonged. In a letter written about this date, her step-daughter, after quoting a gay little quatrain of hers about some dyes that the children were concocting, adds — "But though my mother makes epigrams, she is far from well." So kaleidoscopic is the succession of these "mothers" of Miss Edgeworth, that emotion tends to dry up under it, and even the most patient of biographers wearies a little before the duty of chronicling their various arrivals and exits. It was in November 1797 that Mrs. Elizabeth Edgeworth died, and, while the following year was still young, we already perceive preludings pointing to the arrival of another — it is a relief to be able to assert the last wife positively of Mr. Edgeworth! An illustrated edition of *The Parent's Assistant* was being projected by the publishers, and Miss Beaufort (the daughter of a rector in a neighbouring county) had requested to be allowed to undertake the illustrations. The matter entailed

interviews with Mr. Edgeworth, and the interviews led to — their inevitable result! For once the devoted Maria seems to have shown some little dismay over these precipitate proceedings. She held back, and could not immediately be cordial. Soon, however, we find her writing to Miss Beaufort, and in a tone, moreover, the dutifulness of which would to most of us have appeared to be rather beyond what the occasion required.

As had by this time become his habit, Mr. Edgeworth not only married in a somewhat singular fashion, but he selected a particularly singular time and place in which to get married. The country was now rocking in the very throes of rebellion. The marriage took place in Dublin, and the bride's experiences upon her progress from there to Edgeworthstown were more exciting evidently than pleasant. Few people, she tells us, were to be seen along the roads, a fact hardly to be wondered at, considering that at an inn called "The Nineteen Mile House," where they were delayed for a while, a woman, whom they found alone in the kitchen, came up to them and whispered, "The boys (the rebels) are hid in the potato furrows beyond." Mr. Edgeworth, we hear, was rather startled at this intelligence, but took no notice. "A little further on," Mrs. Edgeworth continues, "I saw something very odd on the side of the road before us." "What is that?" "Look to the *other side*. *Don't* look at it!" cried Mr. Edgeworth. After they had passed, he told her that it was a car turned up, between the shafts of which a man was hung, murdered by the rebels.

In spite of these and similarly pleasing incidents,

they arrived safe and sound at Edgeworthstown, where they found the family perfectly calm as regards their safety, although in a flutter of excitement over the arrival of the hitherto almost unknown stepmother.

Nothing, perhaps, strikes outsiders more forcibly than the light-hearted fashion in which the peril of situations such as these is apt to be treated by the people most concerned, a fact which those who have passed through similar, if milder, ordeals in later years in Ireland, will be able to bear out from their own experience. Maria Edgeworth's letters, written at this date, positively brim over with jests, both as regards the situation at large, and her own share in it. — "All that I crave for my own part," she exclaims in one of them, "is that if I am to have my throat cut, it may not be by a man with his face blackened with charcoal! I shall look at every person that comes here very closely to see if there be any marks of charcoal upon their visages. Old wrinkled offenders I should suppose would never be able to wash out their stains; but in others a *very* clean face will, in my mind, be a strong symptom of guilt — clean hands proof positive, and clean nails ought to hang a man."

In another letter, written to her cousin Sophy about a month after her father's marriage, the following picture of absolute domestic tranquillity occurs: — "So little change has been made in the way of living, that you would feel as if you were going on with your usual occupations and conversation amongst us. We laugh and talk, and enjoy the good of every day, which is more than sufficient. How long this may last we cannot tell. I am going on in the old way, writing stories. I cannot be a captain of dragoons,

and sitting with my hands before me would not make any of us one degree safer. . . . I have finished a volume of wee-wee stories, about the size of the *Purple Jar*, all about Rosamund. *Simple Susan* went to Foxhall a few days ago for Lady Ann to carry to England. My father has made our little rooms so nice for us; they are all fresh painted and papered. Oh, rebels! oh, French! spare them! We have never injured you, and all we wish is to see everybody as happy as ourselves."

The word "French" in this letter introduces us to what was by far the most exciting public event with which Maria Edgeworth was ever destined to be connected. Not many historic incidents are less tempting to dwell upon as a whole than is the Irish Rebellion of 1798. It had been so long foreseen, and so completely had the commonest precautions to avert it been neglected, as to give colour to the suspicion that it had been actually desired by those in authority at the time in Ireland. When, moreover, the long expected happened, and the rising broke out, it is difficult to say upon which side the weight of condemnation for sheer brutality, or wanton cruelty, deserves to press most heavily. From its first beginnings — from the picketings and the half hangings in the north; from the pitch-cappings and floggings in the Ridinghouse of Beresford; afterwards through the whole of the proceedings of the rebels in Wicklow, Wexford, and Kildare — the hideous business of the burning of the barracks at Prosperous, the daily massacres of prisoners on Vinegar Hill, the horrors of the barn of Scullabog, and of the bridge of Wexford, — these followed in their turn by a series of executions, one at least admittedly

unjust, several dictated by personal malice or the merest caprices of panic — the whole scene positively reeks with horror, a horror which hardly a gleam of humanity arises to temper. One episode indeed to some extent redeems the distasteful story. Unfortunately the heroes of that episode were neither Irish heroes, nor yet English ones. Few historical occurrences are more striking, and at the same time less familiar to even fairly well read students of history, than is this descent upon Ireland in the year 1798 of a mere handful of French soldiery, led by a group of officers of that indomitable type which it is the pride and glory of the French Revolution to have brought to the front.

A more visibly hopeless attempt than this probably never was imagined, yet rarely has any expedition so ludicrously ill provided gone nearer to success than it did. The entire incident is so unique as to be worth a moment's dwelling on, the more so since it has a direct connection with the subject of this little book, it having been Maria Edgeworth's singular fortune — mounted upon her faithful "Dapple," that remarkable war-horse! — to have assisted at the last scene of this ill-starred, but most gallant of adventures.

Before glancing for a moment at the larger incidents of the time, it will be better first to follow the adventures of the Edgeworth family, as we find them given in their own letters. Those letters are so graphic that, although not new, they ought not, I think, to be entirely omitted. The first part of the tale is told by Maria, in a letter to Mrs. Ruxton, a letter sent off evidently in hot haste, to relieve the latter's mind. It is dated from the inn at Longford, where the

family had temporarily taken refuge, after clinging to their home to the last moment — in fact until the rebels were reported to be in sight.

"*Sept.* 5, '98.

"My dearest Aunt, — We are all safe and well, and have had two most fortunate escapes from rebels, and from the explosion of an ammunition cart. Yesterday we heard, about ten o'clock in the morning, that a large body of rebels, armed with pikes, were within a few miles of Edgeworthstown. My father's yeomanry were at this moment gone to Longford for their arms, which Government had delayed sending. We were ordered to decamp, each with a small bundle; the two chaises full, and my mother and Aunt Charlotte on horseback. We were all ready to move, when the report was contradicted; only twenty or thirty men, it was now said, were in arms, and my father hoped we might still hold fast to our dear home.

"Two officers and six dragoons happened at this moment to be on their way through Edgeworthstown, escorting an ammunition cart from Mullingar to Longford: they promised to take us under their protection, and the officer came up to the door to say he was ready. My father most fortunately detained us; they set out without us. Half an hour afterwards, as we were quietly sitting in the portico, we heard — as we thought close to us — the report of a pistol, or a clap of thunder, which shook the house. The officer soon afterwards returned, almost speechless; he could hardly explain what had happened. The ammunition cart, containing nearly three barrels of gunpowder, packed in tin cases, took fire and burst, half way on the road to Longford. The man who drove the cart was blown to atoms — nothing of him could be found; two of the horses were killed, others were blown to pieces, and their limbs scattered to a distance; the head and body of a man were found a hundred and twenty yards from the spot. Mr. Murray was the name of the officer I am speaking of: he had with him a Mr. Rochfort and a Mr. Nugent. Mr. Rochfort was thrown from his horse, one side of his face was

terribly burnt, and stuck over with gunpowder. He was carried into a cabin, and they thought he would die, but they now say he will recover. The carriage has been sent to take him to Longford. I have not time or room, my dear aunt, to dilate, or tell you half I have to say. If we had gone with this ammunition, we must have been killed.

"An hour or two afterwards, however, we were obliged to fly from Edgeworthstown. The rebel pikemen, three hundred in number, actually were within a mile of the town. My mother, Aunt Charlotte, and I rode; we passed the trunk of a dead man, bloody limbs of horses, and two dead horses, by the help of men who pulled on our steeds; all safely lodged now in Mrs. Fallon's inn."

Mrs. Edgeworth here takes up the tale:—

"Before we had reached the place where the cart had been blown up, Mr. Edgeworth suddenly recollected that he had left on the table in his study a list of the yeomanry corps, which he feared might endanger the poor fellows and their families if it fell into the hands of the rebels. He galloped back for it — it was at the hazard of his life — but the rebels had not yet appeared. He burned the paper, and rejoined us safely.

"The landlady of the inn at Longford did all she could to make us comfortable, and we were squeezed into the already crowded house. Mrs. Billamore, our excellent housekeeper, we had left behind for the return of the carriage, which had taken Mr. Rochfort to Longford. But it was detained, and she did not reach us till the next morning, when we learned from her that the rebels had not come up to the house. They had halted at the gate, but were prevented from entering by a man whom she did not remember to have ever seen; but he was grateful to her for having lent money to his wife when she was in great distress, and we now, at our utmost need, owed our safety and that of the house to his gratitude. We were surprised to find that this was thought by some to be a suspicious circumstance, and that it showed Mr. Edgeworth to be a favourer of the rebels! An express arrived at night to

say the French were close to Longford; Mr. Edgeworth undertook to defend the gaol, which commanded the road by which the enemy must pass, where they could be detained till the King's troops came up. He was supplied with men and ammunition, and watched all night; but in the morning news came that the French had turned in a different direction, and gone to Granard, about seven miles off."

A few words will bring the larger incidents of the time up to this point. The landing-place which the invaders had chosen for their descent was Killala, a small town upon the coast of Mayo, at that time the seat of a Protestant bishopric, one which has since then been merged into the larger diocese of Tuam. By far the best account of the whole affair is to be found, not in any of the official records of the time, but in a small and rather scarce book — *Narrative of what passed at Killala during the French Invasion*, by an Eye-witness. The eye-witness was the bishop himself, Dr. Stock, a prelate whose energy and courage shone out with great distinction under so new and entirely unlooked for a variation of the ordinary episcopal functions.

The whole account of the relations between him and his captors reads like a series of scenes out of some brilliant little comedy, or tragi-comedy, and ought to be found irresistible upon the stage, could we by any means conceive of anything relating to Irish history finding favour there. So little expectation of invasion was there at the time that, when three strange vessels were observed to enter the bay, two of the bishop's sons rowed out in a small boat to ascertain who the strangers were. They were detained, of course, and the embarkation was accomplished without the

slightest difficulty. The few yeomen and fencibles who chanced to be in Killala were put to flight, and before evening the new masters of the place had established themselves, without molestation, in the Castle of Killala, at that time the residence of Bishop Stock, his wife, and their eleven children.

As the only person in the neighbourhood who was well acquainted with French, it fell to the lot of the bishop to have to act as interpreter between the foreign invaders and their native adherents, who came swarming into Killala from all the country round about. Happily for the defenceless Protestants, if wild and ignorant to the last degree, the latter showed not a symptom of that ferocity which has left so black a stain upon the rising in Wexford and other parts of the east of Ireland. There had been no ill-usage in this case to sting the people to fury, and the whole account of their behaviour reads less like that of violent and determined rebels, than like the behaviour of a crowd of astonished and excited children. They danced with delight when they received their new uniforms, as well as the rifles which had been provided for them, the latter of which they at once proceeded to fire off in all directions, and at everything — especially the crows. On one occasion the bishop mentions that a bullet actually struck the hat of the French officer in command, who happened to be speaking to him at the moment!

But this portion of the story, although tempting to dilate upon, must be left half told, seeing that the only part of the invaders' proceedings with which this book has any proper connection was enacted in quite another direction.

Upon the first news of the French descent, the troops in Connaught had been ordered by Lord Cornwallis to concentrate at Castlebar. The officer in command was General Lake, whose reputation for inhumanity as regards the early part of the rising is so black that it is difficult to resist a feeling of satisfaction in the fact that it was upon him that the subsequent disgrace mainly fell. He had arrived at Castlebar only the very evening before the attack, thereby superseding Major-General Hamilton, who had previously been in command. The regular road from Killala to Castlebar lies through the village of Foxford, and a force of some twelve hundred men under General Taylor had been sent to hold this against the invaders. At three o'clock on the morning of the 27th of August there arrived a messenger to inform the general that the French were advancing, not by the usual road, but along a rude hilly track, a track so rough that the few guns they possessed had to be dragged over the rocks by the peasants. But for this accidental warning the garrison would almost certainly have been surprised in their beds, and the panic which followed would in that case have been comparatively excusable. As it was, General Lake had time to draw out his forces, and to dispose them in an excellent position above Castlebar, flanked by a marsh and a small lake. The entire force under his orders amounted to over four thousand men, nearly half of which seems to have been employed in this manner. They consisted chiefly of yeomanry and militia, but there were also a certain number of regular troops and a strong body of artillery. Under these circumstances, it was naturally regarded as incredible that so mere a handful as the invaders were known

to be, would venture to assail a position held by a foe more than twice their number, and fresh after a night's rest. In so calculating, General Lake and his staff underrated the spirit of the men to whom the 1796–1797 campaign in Italy was still a very recent experience. Undismayed by the numbers opposed to them, and despite the fact of their having been already nearly fifteen hours on foot, the French came steadily up the hill, in the face of a fire which scattered their untrained assistants right and left. The top reached, they rushed upon the defenders with level bayonets. The artillery stood to their guns, Lord Roden's cavalry behaved well, but the rest of the troops seem hardly to have attempted to make a stand. Within a few minutes the whole force was flying in wild confusion towards the town. Through the streets of Castlebar they were driven before the French bayonets, and out into the country beyond, over which they continued to stream, flinging their weapons away from them in all directions in their headlong haste.

It was, as will be seen from this brief account, less a defeat than a simple rout, or, as it has always been called in Ireland, a race — the Race of Castlebar. The whole incident is fortunately almost without a parallel, for even supposing the conduct of the troops to have been due to mere panic, that of General Lake himself still remains inexplicable. He had seen the foe with his own eyes, consequently must have known approximately what their numbers were. In spite of this, upon his arrival at Tuam, thirty miles away, he informed the inhabitants that the French were in pursuit, and that they must make the best terms they could for themselves. A similarly alarmist report

reached Lord Cornwallis, as the despatches of the day clearly show. That night, or early the next day, General Lake left Tuam, and pushed on towards Athlone, collecting the demoralised remains of his force as he went. The activity displayed upon this occasion seems to have been most remarkable, some of the men who had fled from Castlebar having never ceased running all that night, and having reached Athlone, it is said, within the twenty-eight hours![1]

What lends an element almost of comedy to the whole affair is that the originators of this panic never made the slightest attempt to pursue! The French remained quietly at Castlebar, satisfied, and very naturally satisfied, with what they had already achieved. Here they stayed, recruiting themselves, and seeking for reinforcements for about ten days. Meanwhile fresh troops had been hurried over from England. Lord Cornwallis, the commander-in-chief, had himself advanced as far as Hollymount, having under him a force of not less than twenty thousand men. Finding themselves in danger of being surrounded, the invaders at length left Castlebar, and started towards Sligo, apparently with a wild idea of making a *détour*, and so descending upon Dublin. Had they reached the country a couple of months sooner, and while the rising at Wexford was still absorbing all the energies of the military, it is hard

[1] For further contemporary accounts, see *The Cornwallis Correspondence*, vol. ii. pp. 402 to 410; also *An Impartial Relation of the Military Operations in consequence of the Landing of the French Troops*, by an Officer under Lord Cornwallis; *Notice Historique sur la Descente des Français*, par L. O. Fontaine (Adjutant-General to General Humbert); also *Saunders's Newsletter* and *Faulkner's Journal* of that date.

to say what might not have happened. As it was, the rising had been by this time effectually crushed. A reaction of terror had spread over the whole east of Ireland. The hour for success was over, and after one sharp brush with Colonel Vereker at Collooney, near Sligo, there was nothing before the invaders but an honourable surrender.

This took place upon the 8th of September at Ballinamuck, a little village upon the borders of Longford and Roscommon. At this euphoniously named place, the French found Lord Cornwallis posted with his entire force. Although augmented by some two hundred of their own number, whom they had previously left at Killala, the invaders still barely amounted to eight hundred and forty men. Eight hundred and forty against twenty thousand is rather long odds, even for heroes! They capitulated accordingly, stipulating only for fair terms. These were conceded, and in their case were strictly adhered to, although their wretched adherents were mercilessly cut down, or, when captured, hung without ceremony. A dramatic touch is lent to the end of the affair by one detail more. The French officers, released upon their parole, seem to have ridden back to Dublin with the members of Lord Cornwallis's staff. The rank and file, packed into a string of turf-boats, were sent there by means of the canal. I have seen an account by an eye-witness, in one of the Dublin newspapers of that day, which graphically describes their being slowly towed along, singing or shouting the "Marseillaise" at the tops of their voices, as they floated through the bogs.

So ended this extraordinary little incident, hardly

a gratifying one from the military point of view, but at least what is called "instructive." Years afterwards, at St. Helena, Napoleon is said to have dwelt with especial emphasis upon the error he had committed in not having made a descent upon Ireland one of the main points of his campaign against England. Had he done so, and had fortune favoured him, it would be bold to assert that his success, so far as Ireland was concerned, might not have been complete. Seeing what was achieved by the utterly inadequate force which did land, it would require more than an ordinary amount of national vanity to deny that, given a sufficient one, led by Napoleon himself, or one of the best of his subordinates, the entire island might have been overrun. It is true that at worst this could only have been temporary, seeing that Ireland, like every other newly acquired French possession, would have had to be surrendered at the end of the war. That event, however, was still fifteen years off, and in the meantime the effect, especially as regards the loss of prestige, would have been enormous. Happily the peril was averted, as other and not less grave perils have been averted from England both before and since. The fates were kind, just as they had been kind thirteen months previously, when for some six weeks the Channel seemed to be well-nigh defenceless, the crew of every man-of-war having recently been in mutiny, while a hostile fleet with thirteen thousand troops on board, lay at the Texel, waiting to embark. Only the winds — far from inconstant — stood firm to their allegiance, remaining throughout those six weeks at the one point from which it was impossible then for any enemy to reach

these shores. "Those ancient and unsubsidised allies of England," as Sydney Smith calls them, "allies upon which English ministers depend as much for saving kingdoms as washerwomen do for drying clothes" — the winds — were faithful, and, while they continued steadily at the same point, the perilous moment passed!

This dash into the wider arena of history has taken longer, however, than it ought to have done. It is time to return to our Edgeworth family, whom we left shut up in their inn, and counting the hours till they could escape, alike from rebels and defenders, back to their beloved home, and to its pursuits. As often happens in such cases, the dangers incurred from the zeal of the local loyalist seem to have been much the most formidable of the perils of the hour. Mrs. Edgeworth in her *Memoir* gives a lively description of the narrow escape sustained by her husband from the misplaced zeal of his Longford townsfolk: —

"We were all at the windows of a room in the inn looking into the street, when we saw people running, throwing up their hats, and huzzaing. A dragoon had just arrived with the news that General Lake's army had come up with the French and the rebels, and completely defeated them at a place called Ballinamuck, near Granard. But we soon saw a man in a sergeant's uniform haranguing the mob, not in honour of General Lake's victory, but against Mr. Edgeworth. The landlady was terrified; she said that Mr. Edgeworth was accused of having made signals to the French from the gaol, and she thought the mob would pull down her house."

This imaginary illumination is explained to have meant nothing more formidable than two farthing

candles, by the light of which Mr. Edgeworth, who was in charge of the gaol, had been reading the newspaper late the preceding night. These farthing candles the over-strained fancy of the townspeople had construed into signals to the enemy! The excitement seems to have been at first appeased by seeing Mr. Edgeworth arrive at his inn, accompanied by an officer in uniform. Later in the evening, this officer, Major Eustace, having incautiously changed his clothes, both narrowly escaped being murdered on the very door-step: —

"Mr. Edgeworth went after dinner with Major Eustace to the barrack. Some time after dinner dreadful yells were heard in the street, the mob had attacked them on their return from the barrack, Major Eustace being in coloured clothes, they did not recognise him as an officer. They had struck Mr. Edgeworth with a brickbat in the neck, and as they were now just in front of the inn, collaring the Major, Mr. Edgeworth cried out in a loud voice, 'Major Eustace is in danger.' Several officers who were at dinner in the inn, hearing the words through the open window, rushed out sword in hand, dispersed the crowd in a moment, and all the danger was over."

This seems to have been the last of the family perils. We have only one other extract bearing upon the situation, namely the following picture from Miss Edgeworth's pen of the historic battlefield of Ballinamuck, to which — mounted upon the trusty "Dapple" — she rode in company with her father and Mrs. Edgeworth. The letter is to her cousin Sophy Ruxton: —

"Enclosed I send you a little sketch, which I traced from

one my mother drew for her father, of the situation of the field of battle at Ballinamuck; it is about four miles from the hills. My father, mother, and I rode to look at the camp. Perhaps you recollect a pretty turn in the road, where there is a little stream with a three-arched bridge? In the fields which rise in a gentle slope on the right hand side of this stream about sixty bell tents were pitched, the arms all ranged on the grass; before the tents, poles with little streamers flying here and there, groups of men leading their horses to water, others filling kettles and black pots, some cooking under the hedges; the various uniforms looked pretty; Highlanders gathering blackberries. My father took us to the tent of Lord Henry Seymour, who is an old friend of his; he breakfasted here to-day, and his plain English civility, and quiet good sense, was a fine contrast to the mob, etc. Dapple, your old acquaintance, did not like all the sights at the camp quite as well as I did."

It all sounds remarkably pleasant, and not at all unlike the report of some unusually successful picnic! That there was another side to the matter — that the country had narrowly escaped from a most formidable peril; that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of deluded peasants were at that moment paying for their folly and ignorance with their lives, and the destruction of their homes — all this seems hardly to cast a shade over the picture. The latest record which Miss Edgeworth has left behind her of this year of terror, massacre, and invasion refers to the family *cats!* —

"I forgot to tell you of a remarkable event in the history of our return; all the cats, even those who properly belong to the stable, and who had never been admitted to the honours of sitting in the kitchen, all crowded round Kitty with congratulatory faces, crawling up her gown, insisting upon caressing and being caressed when she re-appeared in the

lower regions. Mr. Gilpin's slander against cats as selfish, unfeeling animals, is thus refuted by stubborn facts."

In this manner—with the cheerful return of the family to their customary occupations, and amid the rejoicings of the cats—the grim tale of the year 1798 comes to an end!

CHAPTER VII

CASTLE RACKRENT—IRISH LETTERS

In the month of January 1800 we find Miss Edgeworth inquiring of her cousin how certain books are to be sent to her aunt Mrs. Ruxton, who at the time was from home. The letter ends—"We have begged Johnson to send you *Castle Rackrent*. I hope it has reached you? Do not mention to any one that it is ours. Have you seen *Minor Morals* by Mrs. Smith? There is in it a beautiful little botanical poem called the 'Calendar of Flora.'"

Minor Morals by Mrs. Smith seems to have been at least as important a work in Miss Edgeworth's estimation as *Castle Rackrent*. This letter to her cousin, though not otherwise noteworthy, is interesting as regards two points. One is the inclusion of her father as joint author with herself, even in the case of a book in the writing of which we know, as a matter of absolute certainty, that he had no part. The other is this very characteristic belittling of what other people are still prepared to regard as a work of some merit!

No view of Miss Edgeworth can be more erroneous than the one which supposes in her a desire to pose upon any self-raised pedestal. So far from this, I am inclined to think that—as in the case of another

eminent woman-writer not long dead—she might have made a more enduring mark had she taken her own pretensions a trifle more seriously than she did. This point seems to be worth emphasising, since there is a tendency to confound her in this respect with her father, and to place the stamp of pedagogic self-sufficiency alike on both. How little the daughter deserved the accusation the above letter alone shows, and as in that instance so in others, save where the adored parent was concerned, whose lightest emendation weighed more with her than the whole of those writings, which it is our present presumptuous opinion such emendations disfigure.

Turning to the book itself. *Castle Rackrent* stands upon an entirely different footing from any of Miss Edgeworth's other writings. In it alone we find her regarding life,—not from any utilitarian, ethical, or dogmatic standpoint,—but simply and solely objectively, as it strikes, and as it ought to strike, an artist. So far from any cut-and-dry code of morals being enforced in it, morals of every sort are even startlingly absent. To find a book in which an equally topsy-turvy view is presented, without so much as a hint of disapproval upon the part of the author, we should have to go back as far as to Defoe. Take it from whatever point of view we like—moral, philosophical, social, political—it seems to stand outside of the entire code, human or divine. It has been sometimes asserted that Miss Edgeworth was the parent and first inventor of that engine of instruction "The Novel with a Purpose," but if *Castle Rackrent* is a novel with a purpose, one would be glad to be told what that purpose precisely is?

Admiration for the book's own singular merits is enhanced, moreover, I think, when we consider both the difficulty of the subject, and the antecedent improbability of any one in the position of its author being able to surmount them. "Honest Thady," although calling himself a steward, is in reality a peasant, with all the ideas and instincts of one; an eighteenth century peasant, one who has always lived, and whose forebears before him have always lived, under the same lords, and to whom therefore their little peculiarities have come to be as it were a law of nature, no more to be disputed than the over-frequency of wet days, or the inclemencies of the winter. All peasants are difficult and elusive creatures to portray, but perhaps an Irish peasant—alike by his good and by his bad qualities—is the most elusive and the most difficult upon the face of the earth. Any one who has ever tried to fling a net over him knows perfectly well in his or her own secret soul that the attempt has been a failure—at best that entire realms and regions of the subject have escaped observation. A whole world of forgotten beliefs, extinct traditions, lost ways of thought, obsolete observances, must be felt, known, understood, and realised, before we can even begin to perceive existence as we are expected to see it by such an one as Thady. Especially was this the case at that date with regard to certain mysterious institutions known as "masters"; beings born, in the old Irish phrase, to "reign over" the rest of the world, and as little expected to be trammelled by the ordinary rules of right and wrong as any Olympian deities. An ingenious friend of the present writer not long since remarked that the only parallel for the ways of Sir

Condy and his predecessors which is to be found in literature is that of the equally admired and respected Noor ad Deen of the *Arabian Nights*. This worthy, it may be remembered, gives away his father's houses and lands to any one who happens to take a fancy to them, and being upon one occasion somewhat pressed for debt, he sells his wife — with her entire approval — in the market-place. Finally, he meets with her again; they escape together; and, being rather hungry, he is so overcome with gratitude to a fisherman who has given him a couple of fishes, that he not only forces him to accept of all his remaining gold, but of his wife into the bargain, this time *without* that lady's consent or approval.

To what extent the parallel can be said to hold good I leave to more discriminating minds! Certainly, to our sober notions, the code of honour and morals, as we see them through Thady's eyes, is to the full as mysterious as any Eastern one could be. How Miss Edgeworth — daughter of an irreproachable father, one who never got drunk, even when common politeness might have required him to do so — managed to, so to speak, "get behind" such a standpoint, will always remain a puzzle. Fortunately, as regards the actual production of the book, we are not left entirely to our own unassisted guesses, since we have its author's account of the matter, one written many years later in response to an appeal for enlightenment from a correspondent. Although printed, this account has also never, I think, been published before: —

"EDGEWORTHSTOWN, *Sept.* 6, 1834.

"... The only character drawn from the life in *Castle Rackrent* is 'Thady' himself, the teller of the story.

He was an old steward (not very old, though, at that time; I added to his age, to allow him time for the generations of the family). I heard him when I first came to Ireland, and his dialect struck me, and his character; and I became so acquainted with it, that I could think and speak in it without effort; so that when, for mere amusement, without any idea of publishing, I began to write a family history as Thady would tell it, he seemed to stand beside me and dictate; and I wrote as fast as my pen could go. The characters are all imaginary. Of course they must have been compounded of persons I had seen, or incidents I had heard, but how compounded I do not know; not by 'long forethought,' for I had never thought of them till I began to write, and had made no sort of plan, sketch, or framework. There is a fact, mentioned in a note, of Lady Cathcart having been shut up by her husband, Mr. M'Guire, in a house in this neighbourhood. So much I knew, but the characters are totally different from what I had heard. Indeed, the real people had been so long dead, that little was known of them. Mr. M'Guire had no resemblance, at all events, to my Sir Kit, and I knew nothing of Lady Cathcart but that she was fond of money, and would not give up her diamonds. Sir Condy's history was added two years afterwards: it was not drawn from life, but the good-natured and indolent extravagance was suggested by a relation of mine long since dead. All the incidents are pure *invention;* the duty work, and duty fowl, *facts.*"

Further than this we cannot get. The book grew—as most of the good books the world possesses have

probably grown — by a process peculiar to itself, a process not to be fully explained by its author, and still less therefore by any one else. One fact, at least, is clear to our satisfaction, namely, that it came into existence by a process the exact opposite of all Mr. Edgeworth's theories as to the methods which conduce to the production of superior literature. So subversive is it of these, so wholly independent and revolutionary, that some wonder arises that he did not — upon his return from those duties which had so fortunately detained him during its inception — order the cancelling, or the complete remodelling, of anything so heterodox. Had he done so, we cannot doubt that it would have been condemned by its creator without a qualm. Happily he abstained; *Castle Rackrent* survived, and Sir Murtagh, Sir Kit, and Sir Condy have remained to be the amusement and the bewilderment of three generations of appreciative readers.

That a book which stole upon the world in so quiet and anonymous a fashion should have at once made its mark, is a fact creditable, I think, to the literary perceptions of that day. By the following year a new edition had been urgently called for, and this time "By Maria Edgeworth" appeared upon the title-page. "Its success," Mrs. Edgeworth writes in her *Memoir*, "had been so triumphant that some one — I heard his name at the time but do not remember it, and it is better forgotten — not only asserted that he was the author, but actually took the trouble to copy out several pages with corrections and erasures, as if it was his original MS." A year later, writing from Paris, the same lady tells her correspondent that "*Castle Rackrent* has been translated into German, and we saw

in a French book an extract from it, giving the wake, the confinement of Lady Cathcart, and Thady sweeping the stairs with his wig, as common and usual occurrences in that extraordinary kingdom."

Considering this exceptional and quite unlooked for success, it seems curious that Miss Edgeworth should never again have tried her hand at a story in the same vein. Certainly she never did so. Her other Irish books, *The Absentee*, *Ennui*, *Ormond*, are all of them excellent stories, but as a transcript direct from life, unaltered in the telling, unshackled by any theory, unhampered by moralising, *Castle Rackrent* stands alone. Of her numerous other writings, the ones which seem to stand nearest to it, alike for freedom and originality, are her familiar letters, for which I have already expressed my own extreme admiration. Out of various still unprinted ones belonging to this date I have selected the following three. The first is entirely taken up, as will be seen, with the description of a house in which she was then staying, the dilapidation of which almost exceeds credibility. It will be recognised by readers of *Ormond* as having been afterwards utilised as the home of "King Condy":—

"CHANTINÉE, *July 3rd*, 1808.

"I must reserve the amusement of describing the humours of Chantinée till we meet, for folios of paper would not give you an adequate idea of their infinite variety. The house in which I now enjoy myself has stood, certainly, in spite of fate, and of all the efforts of man to throw it down or blow it up. Tell William, and try if you can to make him believe it, that, after this house was built, the owner quarried and blasted the

rocks underneath it, till he made a kitchen twenty feet square and various subterranean offices. A gentleman who was breakfasting with him at the time this blasting underneath them was going on, heard one of the explosions, and starting, Mr. Corry quietly said, 'It is only the blasting in the kitchen, finish your breakfast.' But the visitor, not being so well trained as Charles the Twelfth's secretary, ran out of the house. After all this was accomplished, and the house, contrary to the prophecies of all who saw, or heard of it, still standing, the owner set to work at the roof, which he fancied was too low. You may judge of the size and weight of the said roof when I tell you that it covers a hall 42 feet long — two oblong rooms at each end of the hall 33 and 35 long, by above 20 broad, and an oval room at the back of the hall seven and twenty by four and twenty. Undaunted by the ponderous magnitude of the undertaking, this intrepid architect cut all the rafters of the roof clean off from the walls on all sides, propped it in the middle, and fairly raised it altogether by men and levers, to the height he wanted; there it stood propped in air till he built the walls up to it, pieced the rafters and completed it to his satisfaction! But alas, he slated it so ill, or so neglected to slate it at all, that, in rainy weather, torrents of water pour in, and in winter it is scarcely habitable, by man or brute. The walls and coved ceilings of the fine rooms, and all the really beautiful cornices, are so stained and spoiled with damp, that it is lamentable and provoking to behold them. In the drawing-room (I hope you have firm confidence in my truth, or you will now certainly think I am fabling) there is a fuchsia sixteen feet high, trained to a dead

stem of alder which is planted in its tub. The fuchsia is six feet broad and as thick as the matted honeysuckle on the garden wall; and you may shake it as you would a sheet of honey-suckle that you were pulling down. Geraniums 13 and 14 feet high all round the bow-window of this room. Some in rich blossom, others ragged, and wild, or as Mr. C. says, in *déshabille*. He sacrifices the neatness of the room, to be sure, to his vegetable loves; for he waters them every morning with soap-suds, which stream about in uncontrolled meanders."

The next letter is to the faithful housekeeper, Mrs. Billamore (familiarly Kitty), whose acquaintance the reader made in the last chapter, and to whose charity towards the wife of one of the rebels the family owed it that Edgeworthstown was not then pillaged, or possibly burnt. When this letter was written Mrs. Billamore was upon a visit at Black Castle, and Miss Edgeworth is posting her up in the doings of the family since her departure: —

"EDGEWORTHSTOWN, *Wednesday* [*no other date*].

"MY DEAR GOOD MRS. BILLAMORE, — I write as I promised you I would, to tell you how all your children do, and how all is going on in your absence. In one word the children are all *well* — and my father pretty *well*, and all going on *well*. Therefore enjoy yourself completely at dear Black Castle. I hope *you* have been well, and I need not ask you whether you are happy. I know it is impossible for any one so nearly connected with this family as you are to be anything but delighted at Black Castle.

"I turned a pig away yesterday from your tree,

where he was routing with all his snout, and Prince was so cowardly that he did not dare to pull him by the ears, he only barked round and round him, and the pig, despising him for a poltroon as he was, went on eating quietly — so I roared out of my window:

"'Is there anybody alive in the back yard?'

"'Yes Ma'am, Pat.'

"'Then run and drive the pig away that is routing at Mrs. Billamore's tree.'

"It was raining very hard, and Pat in his yellow waistcoat, which you know he is scruplesome about wetting, but he ran out instantly, and cursed and stoned the pig, and when the pig ran and squeaked, Prince grew wondrous brave, and chased him through the gate in triumph.

"My mother gathered a bushel of roses out of your garden yesterday, and ornamented the library with them. Fanny and Sophy desire me to tell you that they do the fruit for dessert *every* day and Honora *generally*, so how it is I don't know. All I know is we have plenty of everything, and that is a wonder in these hard times, and Mrs. Billamore away!

"John Langan says that Mistress Bell'more will *be fit to be tied* when she hears that the master has gone and given Pat Carroll four guineas a hundred for the butter, instead of three pound five for which Mrs. Bell'more bargained for it. But Kitty, my dear, if you had seen how happy Pat Carroll looked when he came to pay his rent and my father allowed him that unexpected price! His long chin became two inches shorter, and though he looked before as if he had never smiled since he was created, he then smiled without power to help it, and went away with as

sunshiny a face as ever you saw, *carrolling* his Honor's praises for the best landlord in the three counties.

"We heard of Sneyd's landing safely. My mother heard from Cork, all well. Adieu, my dear good Kitty. — I am your truly affectionate

MARIA EDGEWORTH."

How many people, one wonders, would have taken the trouble to write such a letter, even to the most faithful of housekeepers? Better even than this, the best of all Miss Edgeworth's letters of that date, is, I am inclined to think, the following one to her cousin Sophy Ruxton, concerning the loss of a certain Float, or raft, upon which the Edgeworth family and their visitors were in the habit of crossing the little river Inny, into what had been christened "The Yellow Dwarf's Country," a region lying between Edgeworthstown and Pakenham Hall, on the way to Black Castle. Here the point lies, in the impossibility of ascertaining what *did* befall the Float, one report of the disaster superseding the last — "as fast as the figure of a dragon in the clouds on a windy day." Individuals pass, incidents vary, politics change, but Ireland itself never changes!

"EDGEWORTHSTOWN, *Feb.* 26, 1805.

"Give my love to my uncle and Margaret, and tell them I hear the Float is sunk. It is well we were not upon it! The story of the sinking has been told to me in half a dozen ways, and the report changes as fast as the figure of a dragon in the clouds on a windy day. First it was 'an ass laden with Spanish dollars belonging to one Tierney, of Drogheda, that sank it entirely, only the man caught by the rope and was

saved.' Then it was 'Nine cars loaded with yarn, please your honour, coming to the fair, and Tierney of Drogheda along with them, and they all went down, only Tierney himself and the horses swam ashore.' Then five minutes afterwards we hear that 'The yarn was saved, and nothing in life went down but the Float itself, though all the men, and cars, and yarn were upon it!' To gain any more correct information at this hour (ten) of the night, and on such a night, would be beyond the power of any 'of woman born': for at this hour of a fair day —

> "'Men, asses, dollars, yarn, in gay confusion fall,
> And one oblivious stream of whisky covers all.'"

CHAPTER VIII

BELINDA — VISIT TO PARIS

We now pass to quite another phase of our author's literary activity. Hitherto we have been considering her — as a writer of children's books; as her father's collaborator, enlivening with her nimble pen his somewhat arid and turgid disquisitions; next, as the producer of a picture of the past, unique in literature, one which may be said to have created a *genre* of its own, a *genre* in which no other writer has even attempted to rival her. We now find ourselves called upon to consider her from an entirely new aspect, as the painter of polite manners, — of "fashionable life," so called — as the delineator of a whole host of belles, beaux, prudes, quizzes, "catch-match-makers," and the like — beings who have either wholly disappeared from existence, or have been rechristened since her time with new names.

As a matter of preference I will not pretend to follow her in this new departure with the same interest as in the preceding one. That is scarcely a reason, however, for failing to recognise her great superiority in it over most of her predecessors, especially over such predecessors as confined themselves within the bounds of the decorous. The first of her "Fashionable Tales" is not included in the two sets of volumes published under that title. Miss Belinda Portman, who gives

her name to the book, has been condemned by various critical persons as cold, artificial, prudish, and so on. She seems for some reason to have been no favourite with her creator; indeed, if we wish to find really damaging criticisms of Miss Edgeworth's books, the best place to look for them is in her own comments! When, a good many years afterwards, she was revising the book for republication, she berates its unfortunate heroine as follows: "I really was so provoked with the cold tameness of that stick or stone, Belinda, that I could have torn the pages in pieces! As the hackney coachman said, 'Mend *you!* Better make a new one!'"

For another bit of self-criticism as lively and as scathing as this, we should have, I think, to look far! My personal acquaintance with the young lady in question happens to be of quite recent origin, although the rest of her sisters in fiction have been intimate acquaintances since childhood. In spite of this unendearing circumstance, I am bound to say that I fail to perceive any very marked difference between them. Belinda — like Helen, like Miss Annaly, Miss Nugent, and the rest of her sisterhood — is at once a remarkably sprightly, and a remarkably discreet young woman. Life is for her a tolerably simple affair, chiefly complicated by the anxiety of her relations to see her suitably married, by her own sense of propriety, and by some slight doubts as to the seriousness of the attentions which she receives from her various suitors. One lamentable affliction the book certainly suffered from. Whereas we have seen that *Castle Rackrent* wholly escaped the parental emendations, upon none of Miss Edgeworth's books did her father's editorial hand fall so heavily, or with such destructive effect, as upon this

unfortunate *Belinda*. Intended to be a lively picture of life, as found in the gayest of gay London drawing-rooms, it was his happy inspiration to decorate it with all the provincial solemnities of Lichfield, and with all the educational aberrations of the late lamented Mr. Day. Because Mr. Day had adopted a "young person," had kept her for years — apparently with the utmost decorum — under his own roof, and had proposed in due time to make her his wife, therefore the hero of *Belinda*, the brilliant Clarence Harvey — a wit, a man of clubs, and of the world — had to be twisted out of all consistency, and forced to do the same! The natural result follows. The whole movement of the book becomes mechanical; the machinery rattles; the wits prose and preach; and a work which had begun as a light and Sheridan-like comedy of manners, sinks into a morass of dull moralising and ponderous, soul-wearying propriety.

Yet, admitting all this, and despite these very serious drawbacks, there is a great deal of excellent writing in *Belinda*. Sir Philip Baddeley's report of the *fêtes* at Frogmore is a gem of the purest water. Excellent also is the scene in which Clarence Harvey borrows Lady Delacour's hoop upon her return from Court, and is introduced to the company as the "Countesse de Pomenare," but loses the bet he has made of being competent to manage it, by stooping too suddenly, thereby overturning the music-stand, and sending the contents of it flying across the room. Lady Delacour herself is not only a fine lady, but a witty one; indeed, Miss Edgeworth's fine ladies almost always seem to carry conviction. It is rather curious, by the way, to note the total failure in this small particular

of a much greater writer, and more perfect artist—the incomparable Jane Austen. *Lady Susan* is not the tale of Miss Austen's which any adorer of hers would assuredly take down by preference. It is a belated story, and a story which ought perhaps never to have been resuscitated. It happens, however, to be the only one in which the habits and customs of this particular species have been minutely portrayed, and it only needs to be opened in order to see how absolutely remote the presentment is from anything that could by any possibility have existed in reality. To Miss Edgeworth, on the other hand, the type was fairly well known, with all its ingratiating little ways; its airs and its graces; its spleens and its vapours; its daintinesses, impertinences, flirtations, indiscretions, and the rest. Her fops, again, are admirable, and are presented in so natural a fashion as almost to make us believe in the creature's reality. A contemporary's opinion is no doubt in such matters of most value, and the truth of her delineations has been vouched for by a contemporary of hers, by no means prone to indulgent judgments—by the redoubtable Lord Jeffrey. We find him speaking of her "faithful representations of the spoken language of persons of wit and politeness"; and again of "that gift of sportive, but cutting *médisance*, which is sure of success in those circles where success is supposed to be the most difficult and desirable."

No doubt Miss Edgeworth's advantages in this respect had been above the average, and she was destined a little later to have further, and yet more enlarged opportunities of studying this desirable art of "sportive, but cutting *médisance*." The Peace of Amiens—that

brief breathing-space for a generation fated to grow up in an atmosphere of continuous fighting — was about to set every one wild with the desire to visit or re-visit Paris, and amongst such curious and intelligent investigators it was only natural that Mr. Edgeworth was to be found.

Before accompanying her thither, it will be necessary to first note down a few more or less important family details, which have been overlooked in larger preoccupations. Some of these belong as far back as the period of the first visit to Clifton, and ought to have been recorded then, but will have to come in here out of their due order. The first in point of time was the visit to his family of "poor Richard," Mr. Edgeworth's seemingly quite unimportant eldest son, who, after a brief appearance, disappears into space, and is heard of no more; primogeniture was apparently not one of the institutions held in high regard by that theorist! Two other events belonging to about the same period were the marriages of Maria's "own" sisters, Anna and Emmeline. The first of these married Dr. Beddoes, and became the mother of the poet of that name; the second shortly afterwards married a Mr. King, a surgeon. These two marriages, and Richard's departure, left Miss Edgeworth herself the only child of the first marriage who still lived at home. Another event belonging to these last years of the century was the brief appearance and disappearance of her father in the character of an Irish legislator. He was returned at the close of 1798 for one of the Longford boroughs, and sat in the last Irish Parliament, the separate existence of which came to an end a few months later. It is characteristic of what is perhaps

the most disreputable of all recorded political jobs that the newly elected member was offered three thousand guineas for the use of his seat during the remaining weeks of the session, but very properly refused, not wishing, in his own words — "to quarrel with myself, and lose my own good opinion at my time of life." We are further informed that, while approving upon the whole of the Union, he voted against it, a proceeding the propriety of which is less immediately obvious. Yet another event of some importance was the death of Dr. Darwin, who was seized with his last illness while in the very act of writing a letter to his friend, Mr. Edgeworth. This was a loss felt in different degrees of intensity by all the various members of the Edgeworth family.

Meantime the production alike of books and of infants seems to have gone on uninterruptedly in that family. In the same year, 1798, *Practical Education* was published, and "was praised and abused enough" — so Mrs. Edgeworth tells us in her *Memoir* — "to make the authors immediately famous." Possibly it was for the sake of sipping this fame in its freshness that Mr. Edgeworth decided to take his daughter and wife to England in the spring of 1799. At Clifton in the same year the first of the children of the fourth and last Mrs. Edgeworth was born — the seventeenth child, by the way, calling Mr. Edgeworth father! In connection with its arrival a quaint little anecdote may be found recorded in the family annals. — "Maria took her little sister to bring down to her father, but when she had descended a few steps a panic seized her, and she was afraid to go either backwards or forwards. She sat down on the stairs, afraid she should drop the child,

afraid that its head would come off, and afraid that her father would find her sitting there and laugh at her; till, seeing the footman passing, she called 'Samuel' in a terrified voice, and made him walk before her backwards down the stairs till she safely reached the sitting-room."

This sister of a newborn had already reached the tolerably mature age of thirty-three, yet to her biographer it is of some interest to reflect that it was not till nearly three years later that occurred the first sentimental adventure which seems ever to have befallen her in her own person. From Clifton the party went to London, and thence home to Edgeworthstown. Eighteen months later they are again in England, visiting Chester, Newcastle, and various other places. At Leicester they made inquiries of a polite bookseller with regard to the sale of *Belinda*, and other recent works of some interest to themselves. By him they were informed that, whereas the others were in good repute, *Castle Rackrent* was in better, the others often borrowed, but *Castle Rackrent* often *bought*. It was apparently upon the same polite bookseller's invitation that they visited a Miss Watts, a local celebrity, whose absolute inability to pick out the illustrious authoress throws an amusing light upon the relative standing and appearance of the ladies of the party.

Escorted, as we gather, by the polite bookseller in person, they were "shown by the light of a lanthorn along a very narrow passage between high walls, to the door of a decent-looking house, where a maid-servant, candle in hand, received us. 'Be pleased, ladies, to walk upstairs.' A neatish room, nothing extraordinary

in it, except the inhabitants. Mrs. Watts, a black-eyed, prim, dragon-looking woman, in the background. Miss Watts, a tall young lady in white, fresh colour, fair, thin oval face, rather pretty. The moment Mrs. Edgeworth entered, Miss Watts, mistaking her for the authoress, darted forward with arms, long thin arms, outstretched to their utmost swing, 'Oh, what an honour this is!' Each word and syllable rising in tone till the last reached a scream. Instead of embracing my mother, as her first action threatened, she started back to the furthest end of the room, which was not light enough to show her attitude distinctly, but it seemed to be intended to express the receding of awe-struck admiration — stopped by the wall! Charlotte and I passed by unnoticed, and seated ourselves by the old lady's desire. Miss Watts was all ecstasy, and lifting up of hands and eyes, speaking always in that loud, shrill, theatrical tone with which a puppet-master supplies his puppets. I, all the time, sat like a mouse. My father asked: 'Which of those ladies, Madam, do you think is your authoress?' 'I am no physiognomist'—in a screech—'but I do imagine that to be the lady,' bowing almost to the ground, and pointing to Mrs. Edgeworth. 'No; guess again.' 'Then that must be she,' bowing to Charlotte. 'No!' 'Then this lady,' looking forward to see what sort of an animal I was, for she had never seen me till this instant. To make me some amends, she now drew her chair close to me, and began to pour forth praises: 'Lady Delacour, O!' 'Letters for Literary Ladies, O!'"

From this zealous but undiscriminating admirer the party withdrew as rapidly as politeness permitted;

even Mr. Edgeworth apparently finding fame on such terms to be in the succinct words of one of his own ancestors — "more onerous than honourable!" A "roomy coach" had already been secured in London, and a few days later Mr. and Mrs. Edgeworth, Maria, and Charlotte made their final start for Paris, and upon the fifth of October 1802, found themselves duly landed at Calais.

From Calais the line of route they had selected lay through Grâvelines and Brussels. They travelled of course in their own coach, to which were fastened by long rope-traces "six Flemish horses of different heights, but each large and clumsy enough to draw an English waggon." "The nose of the foremost horse," says Miss Edgeworth, "was thirty-five feet from the body of the coach, their hoofs all shaggy, their tails long enough to please Sir Charles Grandison." In this fashion they rumbled slowly on through the various towns and villages, seeing most of the things that were worth seeing on the way, all of which are duly reflected in Maria's lively, home-bound letters. At Dunkirk the people struck her as looking like so many "wooden toys set in motion by strings." Between there and Bruges the roads impressed the whole party by their precision, "as if laid out by some inflexible mathematician." The post-houses, on the other hand, seem to have scared the travellers by their filth and their air of desolation, suggestive of the sort of places where respectable English people might expect to be murdered in. Bruges and Ghent were passed, and at both places pictures and churches were seen, but Miss Edgeworth is fortunately merciful to her correspondents in such matters — "Do not be afraid, my

dear Sophy," she writes in one of her letters, "that I am going to overwhelm you with pictures." "It is extremely agreeable to me," she adds in the same letter, "to see paintings with those who have excellent taste, and *no affectation*." It is to be feared that a good deal of our latter-day discourse about the arts would have left so practical and sensible a traveller distinctly cold!

At Brussels a small experience befell them which gives us an entertaining glimpse of Mr. Edgeworth's educationary methods, which seem to have been still in full force. "My father thought that it would be advantageous to us," writes Miss Edgeworth, "to see inferior pictures before seeing those of the best masters, that we might have some points of comparison; and upon the same principle we went to two provincial theatres at Dunkirk and Brussels. But unluckily—I mean unluckily for our *principles*—we saw at Brussels two of the best Paris actors, M. and Madame Talma." The play was Racine's *Andromache*, and the whole party were greatly impressed, as they well might be! At Cambray they were taken to see the preserved head of Fénélon, in honour of whom that town had been recently elevated by Buonaparte into an archbishopric. At Chantilly the stables only were to be seen, the palace having been pulled down during the Revolution, its "white arches covered with crumbling stones and mortar, rising sadly above the ground." Finally they reached Paris, where rooms had been taken for them in "a fine square, formerly Place Louis Quinze, afterwards Place de la Revolution, and now Place de la Concorde." Here the guillotine, barely ten years before, had been at work night and day. Here, as they thrilled to realise,

the King had died, also Marie Antoinette, also Mme. Roland. Opposite their windows was the Seine, and La Lanterne — in short, Paris — full, historic Paris — lay around them.

Nor were their experiences, as is too often the case, limited to such merely inanimate objects of interest. From the first hour of their arrival they seem to have found themselves eagerly welcomed, and before long were in the full swing of meeting, seeing, and being talked to, by every one of note or distinction who was to be found there at the moment.

The letters descriptive of their Parisian experiences have, however, been already given to the world by Mr. Hare in the *Life and Letters*, so that, beyond a few extracts, necessary to preserve continuity, there is no occasion to repeat them here. A mere catalogue of the celebrities met with would alone fill a considerable space. Indeed, with a rather unlooked-for touch of humour, Mrs. Edgeworth herself protests in one of her letters against "Mr. Edgeworth's plan to knock you down with names!" Although all the members of the party wrote home in a more or less lively strain, Maria's letters are, as was to be expected, at once the fullest and the best. Amongst a number of other eminent people we hear of Madame Delessert, and of her daughter, Madame Gautier, who is described as having "fine, large, black eyes, well-dressed, not at all naked." "People," Miss Edgeworth adds for the relief of the aunt to whom she is writing, "need not be naked here unless they choose it." It was for Madame Gautier that Rousseau's *Letters on Botany* were written, so that we may presume so respectable a taste may have preserved her from following the extremities

of the fashion. Of their various new acquaintances the person evidently who came first in Miss Edgeworth's estimation was the Abbé Morellet — "Oh, my dear Aunt Mary, how you would love that man!" she cries. "And we need not be afraid of loving him," she adds, as a judicious afterthought, "for he is near eighty!" M. and Madame Pastoret, Madame Suard, and various others, are passed in review, also Camille Jourdain — "not," it is explained, "the assassin." Madame Récamier, at whose house "beauty, riches, fashion, luxury, and numbers" were to be met with. "Who comes next?" Miss Edgeworth exclaims in her breathless category. — "Kosciusko, cured of his wounds, simple in his manners, like all truly great men. We met him at the house of a Polish countess whose name I cannot spell."

It was while she was in the middle of this letter that the following flattering, if somewhat startling, interruption occurred. "Here, my dear Aunt" — she is writing, as usual, to Mrs. Ruxton — "I was interrupted in a manner that will surprise you, as it surprised me, by the coming in of M. Edelcrantz, a Swedish gentleman, whom we have mentioned to you, of superior understanding and mild manners. He came to offer me his Hand and Heart! My heart, you may suppose, cannot return the attachment, for I have seen very little of him, and have not had time to have formed any judgment, except that I think nothing would tempt me to leave my own dear friends, and my own country, to live in Sweden."

In her *Memoir* of her stepdaughter, Mrs. Edgeworth insists that in thus refusing M. Edelcrantz, Maria was "mistaken in her feelings," and even goes so far as

to assert that she was "exceedingly in love with him." Unquestionably Mrs. Edgeworth was in a position to know the actual facts, yet I find a certain amount of difficulty in accepting that assertion. To suppose that an interview which began and ended in the manner above described was compatible with any very deep-seated affection upon the part of the recorder of it, would be to credit our impulsive letter-writer with a good deal more reticence and secretiveness than even the most discreet of her own heroines! That she looked a trifle pensive when the word "Sweden" was mentioned, can hardly be called a conclusive proof. In any case there is not even a hint on the part of herself, or any of her relations, that she ever repented her refusal, or for a moment regretted the decision she had so unhesitatingly come to. In the eminently practical language of her stepmother — "she was well aware that she would not have suited his position at the Court of Stockholm" — M. Edelcrantz seems to have held the post of scientific secretary to the King of Sweden — "and that her want of beauty might have diminished his attachment." The affair at all events came to a summary conclusion. M. Edelcrantz departed — to Sweden or elsewhere — and the only effect which seems to have followed from it was that a subsequent story, *Leonora*, was written by its author in the style held to be particularly pleasing to her recent suitor. Since it is far from being one of Miss Edgeworth's happiest efforts, it is impossible, in the interests of literature, to feel any particular regret that his influence was not destined to be a more enduring one.

Next to M. Edelcrantz — or possibly before him in importance — came the personage still spoken of, even

in Paris, as "Buonaparte." The relations between this personage and the Edgeworths were not without touches of humour, although, in the end, they came remarkably near to having a serious, not to say a tragic, effect upon the latter's destinies. The first mention of him is in a letter which records their having been taken to the theatre by Madame Récamier. "We were seen," says Mrs. Edgeworth, with an evident flutter of satisfaction, "by Buonaparte himself, who sat opposite to us in a railed box, through which he could see, but not be seen." We are next informed that Mr. Edgeworth was about to be presented to him, but the presentation, for some reason, seems never to have come off. Then follows a letter from Charlotte Edgeworth, in which her correspondent is told that they went to a review, and that at the review "we *saw* a man on a white horse ride down the ranks. We *saw* that he was a little man with a pale face, who seemed very attentive to what he was about, and this was all we *saw* of 'Buonaparte.'" A report that Mr. Edgeworth was the brother of the Abbé Edgeworth had been circulated, which nearly had the effect of causing their expulsion from Paris in the January of 1803. They were able, however, to remain there a few months longer, and to make the acquaintance of La Harpe, of Madame Oudinot (Rousseau's Julie), and of other notabilities; also to call upon Madame de Genlis — a visit which is afterwards described at great length by Maria in a letter to her aunt, Miss Sneyd. Finally the rumours of renewed war grew more and more menacing. A friendly acquaintance, M. le Breton, who happened to call at their hotel, arranged with Mr. Edgeworth that if, when they met the same

evening at a friend's house, he found war to be imminent, he would put on his hat. They met; M. le Breton suddenly put on his hat; the hint was taken; Mr. Edgeworth hurried back to his hotel; the boxes were packed, and they were off.

They were only just in time! How narrow their escape was is clear from the fact that Lovell Edgeworth, who was on his way from Geneva to join his family in Paris, never received the warning which they sent telling him not to do so. He was arrested, and from that time forward for the next twelve years he remained a prisoner in France, in spite of all the efforts of his friends, and of all the interest which the Edgeworth family could command. Happily the members of that family who are our own more immediate concern escaped, and upon March the 6th, 1803, Maria Edgeworth, with her father, stepmother, and sister, landed safely at Dover.

CHAPTER IX

MIDDLE LIFE

From this time forward the stream of Miss Edgeworth's life seems to have settled down into its fixed and final channels. To her readers the interest of that life is of course mainly a literary one, but to herself literature was only one of a dozen or more streams or streamlets of interest, as has been the case with all but a fraction of the persons calling themselves by the name of Author. The doings of her own family — its joys, sorrows, cares, and concerns generally — were then, as always, the staple of her preoccupations, and next to this her various friendships, of which few wielders of the pen have ever had a greater number, or more satisfactory ones than she had.

To us to-day the most interesting of these numerous friendships will always be her friendship with Sir Walter Scott, one fraught with advantage for both writers, and unflecked by even a passing cloud. Their personal acquaintance did not begin until Miss Edgeworth's second visit to Edinburgh in 1823, for although the whole Edgeworth party visited Edinburgh after their return from Paris in 1803, there is no mention of Scott on that occasion, nor was there any particular reason why there should be. As he himself said long afterwards, in reply to a remark of

Lady Scott's on the subject — "Why, my dear, you forget that Miss Edgeworth was not a lion then, and my mane, you know, had not grown at all!" When the first copy of *Waverley* reached her in October 1814, she wrote in a strain of enthusiastic admiration to its unknown and unnamed author, but headed her letter — *Aut Scotus, aut diabolus;* even then the acquaintance between them was evidently only a paper one. The precise date of their meeting is, however, of little importance compared to the effect which they had upon one another as writers, and that the pictures of Irish life and character already given to the world by Miss Edgeworth had a marked effect in determining the direction of Scott's genius, we have his own generous words to prove. Upon her side — as one after the other the miraculous series began to pour forth — delight and admiration verged hard upon idolatry, or what would have been called by that name had it been paid to almost any other author. The first book of Scott's which fell into her hands was, as was natural, a volume of poetry. Two years after her return from Paris, she chanced to be laid up for some time with a rather serious illness, and it was during the convalescence from this illness that *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* was read aloud to her by one of her sisters; the delight which it inspired going far, so we are told, towards contributing to her recovery.

It was thanks to a remarkably happy combination of circumstances that this was the case, for poetry — *quâ* poetry — had to pass through an uncommonly dense and discouraging medium before it could hope to reach Miss Edgeworth! Not many contemporary

poets — not many poets of any race, period, or order of composition — were privileged to find favour at Edgeworthstown. The views of its owner with regard to the undesirableness, it is hardly too much to say the pernicious effect, of that class of literature, may be read at large in his works on education, as well as in the prefaces with which he so considerately adorned his daughter's books. Nor was it alone Poetry, but even its more popular half-sister, Romance, that was there placed under a ban, the result being that it would be difficult to point to any novelist approaching the calibre of Miss Edgeworth from whose writings that eternal source of joy has been so carefully, so elaborately excluded. This makes her devotion to the greatest of all romancers only the more interesting, and, moreover, explains the undoubted fact that it was in this case the greater of the two contemporary writers who profited by the example of the lesser one, rather than the other way. For Walter Scott, romance was not so much a possession, as a mere piece of himself. As easily could we conceive him without eyes, feet, or hands, as without it. No master of the craft, ancient or modern, no Homer of them all, could have helped him to come one whit nearer to it. What he may have gained — what in all probability he did gain — from his keen-eyed little Irish sister, was a closer grip upon the homelier side of reality, especially as regards the ways, doings, talk, look, clothes, and relations to life generally of the peasant class, and of the class which comes nearest to it. That Caleb Balderston, Edie Ochiltree, and the rest, owed something — though it is not very easy to define what — to Thady Quirk, and that to this extent the obligation so

generously insisted upon was true, no student of both writers will, I think, be disposed to question. Upon the other hand, neither Scott nor any other magician — nothing in this wide mysterious world — would, I am bound to confess, have in my opinion brought Miss Edgeworth appreciably nearer to that indefinable, but unmistakable quality, which we mean by the word "romance." How far her father's didactic counsels were responsible for this it is hardly worth while to discuss, seeing that over and above his influence, she had his blood, and any one who has had the advantage of studying that distinguished moralist's style of literature, conversation, and correspondence will feel that, until the last minim of the fluid in question had been expunged from the veins, romance and all that the word conveys, could never hope to penetrate!

In the meantime, life continued to go on at Edgeworthstown in the fashion that has already become tolerably familiar to my readers. It was an astonishingly sociable fashion, even for so exceptionally affectionate a family. Mr. Edgeworth had always made it his principle, we are told, "to allow his children to participate in his own occupations, and thereby to profit by his example." Seclusion, whether for the pursuit of literature, or for any other purpose, was naturally therefore discouraged. All Maria Edgeworth's books were written at her own corner of the table in the library — which was the common living room of the house — amid the talk of the family and the lessons of the children. Less sociably disposed authors may pity her for such an excessive amount of domesticity, but it is quite certain that she

did not pity herself. Whether a little more solitude might have suggested a trifle more belief in those romantic and imaginative elements of existence — oftener found in life than in her lively and instructive pages — we cannot know, and need not therefore trouble ourselves to inquire.

In its more directly sentimental aspect romance did, as it happened, in those days come rather near to Edgeworthstown, though in connection with, perhaps, the least sentimental of all the greater heroes, even of English history. The reader will remember that the Longfords of Pakenham Hall were amongst the nearest neighbours of the Edgeworths, and the engagement, in the spring of 1806, of a daughter of that house — "Sweet Kitty Pakenham" — to that hero of heroes, Sir Arthur Wellesley, was a source of intense excitement to their friends on the other side of the rather ugly piece of level country which divided the two houses. So engrossed were they by it that we hear that — "waking or sleeping, the image of Miss Pakenham swims before our eyes." "To make the romance perfect," writes Miss Edgeworth, "we want two material documents: a description of the person of Sir Arthur, and an exact knowledge of the time when the interview after his return took place." As regards the first of these romantic documents their curiosity is soon set at rest, by their learning from an informant that the hero is "handsome, very brown, quite bald, and a hooked nose." Even royalty seems to have shared in the desire for minute information with regard to this interesting couple, since we are told that when Lady Wellesley was presented at Court upon her marriage, the Queen, after various compliments upon

so "shining" an example of constancy, added — "But did you never write one letter to Sir Arthur during his long absence?" "No, never, Madam." "And did you never think of him?" "Yes, Madam, very often." Miss Edgeworth — in one of whose letters this valuable fragment of dialogue occurs — glows over the excellent effect likely to accrue from so much interest in this same "shining" quality, exhibited in such an illustrious sphere!

In 1807 there was again serious trouble at Edgeworthstown owing to the family scourge of consumption. This time it was Charlotte, the sister who had shared in all the pleasures and perils of the visit to Paris, who was stricken with it. The "State of the Country" — that most familiar of Irish grievances — was also again making itself felt. In Mrs. Edgeworth's *Memoir* we read that — "in the midst of our anxiety for Charlotte, we were disturbed by large parties of men who went about attacking houses and seizing arms. They called themselves 'Thrashers,' and we were roused one night by the sergeant of the yeomanry corps, with the intelligence, that the Thrashers were close to the town in great numbers. Lord Longford's agent, Mr. Rennie, when he was called up in the middle of the night, very naturally said this was a strange country, where a man could not sleep one night in peace! The Thrashers did not, however, come to this house, and except having the windows barricaded for some time, and the yeomanry on guard, we had no further disturbance from them, but these alarms, and our anxiety for Charlotte, made this a melancholy spring. Her increasing illness occupied all our thoughts, and although for months we knew how

it must end, the blow overwhelmed us when it came. She died the seventh of April, 1807."

This evidently was at the time a very crushing sorrow, especially to Maria, whose affection for her own family was of that absorbing type, less common than admirers of the domestic virtues would have us to believe. Next to her father — with regard to whom admiration reached a point difficult for any ordinary biographer to follow — the nearest to Miss Edgeworth's heart seem at this time to have been this sister Charlotte and her brother Henry, no longer the "Little Henry" of earlier days, but a promising young medical student, walking the hospitals in Edinburgh, and on the road to a successful career, one which unhappily was cut short by the same scourge which had already so devastated the family. In the letters written to this brother, Miss Edgeworth is at her very best. They are full, not alone of family details, over the reiteration of which monotony becomes inevitable, but of a variety of other subjects, such as she considered likely to be of interest to him. Space will not permit here of more than the briefest of extracts, despite the fact that several of these letters are still unpublished. After her first visit to Edinburgh, Henry wrote to tell her of the various Scotch notabilities, including the Lord Buchan of that day, who had been eager to see his distinguished sister. —

"I am really very sorry," she writes in reply, "that poor Lord Buchan rose from his sick-bed to see what was so little worth seeing. I wish I had known at the time how much I ought to have been flattered, and I would have conducted myself with becoming propriety. I hope he will never do so any more. If he will come

here, and if I have the headache, I will get up to receive him: — mortal woman cannot do more! — Yes, if I were Madame Recamier, with her pretty bed, etc., etc., I would receive him in my bed-chamber, but at present Fanny's bed, as you very well know, would prevent that!"

In another letter, of about the same date, she promises to pay all possible attentions to a certain "Zoonomia Brown's brother" in whom Henry Edgeworth had expressed an interest: "People of the literary corps are, I think, bound to be kind to one another in all parts of the world; and we, who have received so much advantage from this species of freemasonry, certainly should not neglect the return of good for good." "Upon my word," she exclaims in a third letter, "it is a fine thing to be an Edinburgh Reviewer! Two hundred pounds a year and ten guineas a sheet! Poor authors must hide their diminished heads! But it is always better diversion to tear, than to be torn in pieces. I should not however like to be one of the tearers, except it was the person who wrote the review 'Dumont and Bentham.' I envy that man, whoever he is, but you will never tell me who he is. I assure you my envy would not prompt me to murder him!" "What book do you think Buonaparte was reading at the siege of Acre?" she asks soon afterwards. "Madame de Staël's *Sur l'influence des Passions!* His opinion of her and of her works has wonderfully changed since then. He does not follow Mazarin's wise maxim, 'Let them *talk*, provided they let me *act*.' He may yet find the recoil of that press, with which he meddles so incautiously, more dangerous than those cannon, of which he well knows the management."

These extracts must suffice, nor do any further events of very vital interest seem to have occurred during the ten years that elapsed between the return of the Edgeworths from Paris in 1803 and their visit to London in the year 1813. A variety of details is recorded in the course of them with regard to Mr. Edgeworth's telegraphic inventions. Also about his patent "wheel carriages," a subject upon which Maria was commanded, we learn, to write a long essay at his dictation. "The subject being actually before a Committee of the House of Commons," she tells her cousin Sophy Ruxton, "and Mr. Cummins and all the great engineers and all the great waggoners disputing, 'à outrance' and 'à gorge déployée,' about the comparative merits of cylindrical and conical wheels. So my father, being appealed to, was desirous to state the merits of the said wheels impartially, and he dictated to me, as he walked up and down the library for two hours, nine pages: and the nine pages had to be copied, and nine and nine you are sensible make eighteen, and it was the day I wrote those eighteen pages that I contrived to scrawl that letter to my aunt about Jack Langan."

Devoted daughter, and hardly less devoted niece! A year later the thrilling subject of the moment is a church spire, specially invented and constructed by Mr. Edgeworth, for the embellishment of their parish church, the most striking peculiarity of which seems to have been that it was able to rise from the ground at the sound of a bugle, played by some member of the Edgeworth family, and to take its place, when requested to do so, upon the church tower! — "Walk with me to the spire," Miss Edgeworth writes to her aunt, "and see William standing on the scaffold-

ing round the top of the church tower, which looks like the manned mast of a man-of-war. He gives the signal, and the four men at the corner capstans work the windlasses, and in a few moments, with a slow, majestic motion, the spire begins to ascend. Its gilt ball and arrow glitter higher and higher in the sun, and its iron skeleton rises by beautiful degrees, till, in twelve minutes and a half, its whole transparent form is high in air, and stands composed and sublime in its destined situation."

No wonder that the family were proud! From Mrs. Edgeworth's *Memoir* of her stepdaughter we learn that at about the same date — "Mr. Edgeworth made an addition to Maria's very small room, adding a projecting window, which gives a few feet in space, with great additional light and cheerfulness, and much did she enjoy its advantages, and still more her father's kindness." Here the historian is divided between envy for a daughter who possessed so attentive a father, and for a father who was able to awaken such eager demonstration of gratitude upon such slender provocations! That he occasionally bemoaned the multiplicity of his daughter's domestic duties is also ascertainable, not without satisfaction, from another letter: — "I have been wondrous busy packing books to be bound," she says, in one written about this date, "and have lived upon the ladder, my father deploring the waste of time and the fatigue I underwent. And now the shelves, books and all, are in the most distinguished order!"

In the year 1812 the family are again excited over a marriage, that of their friend Sir Humphry Davy, to Mrs. Apreece, a society personage of some note, and

a giver of good dinners. The wits had amused themselves over this engagement, and much doggerel had been perpetrated, amongst which the following is perhaps the least bad —

> "To the famed widow vainly bow
> Church, Army, Bar, and Navy,
> Says she, 'I dare not take a vow,
> But I will take my Davy.'"

This brings us to 1813, in which year Mr., Mrs., and Miss Edgeworth went to England, and, after a few preliminary visits, arrived in London towards the end of April. It was the first stay of any length that Maria had made there, and the enthusiasm which her appearance aroused is something so foreign to our less impressionable, or possibly less literary, ways, that it would be difficult to credit it, but for the number and unimpeachableness of the witnesses upon the subject. In a note by Sir James Mackintosh, for instance, written in the month of May 1813, we find the following account: —

> "Mr., Mrs., and Miss Edgeworth have just come over from Ireland. I passed some hours with them yesterday forenoon, under pretence of visiting the new Mint, which was a great object to them, as they are all proficients in mechanics. Miss Edgeworth is a singularly agreeable person, very natural, clever, and well-informed, without the least pretensions of authorship. She has never been in a large society before, and she was followed and courted by all persons of distinction in London with an avidity that was almost without example."

Byron, in an entry of his diary written a few years later, recalls his meeting with, and his impressions of, the whole Edgeworth party. He met them, he tells us —"first at a breakfast of Sir Humphry and Lady Davy,

to which I was invited for the nonce." "I had been," he goes on to remark, "the lion of 1812, Miss Edgeworth and Madame de Staël — with the 'Cossack' towards the end of 1813 — were the exhibitions of the succeeding year." Of Mr. Edgeworth his report begins more favourably than it concludes. — "I thought Edgeworth a fine old fellow, of a clarety, elderly, red complexion, but active, brisk, and endless. He was seventy, but did not look fifty." Half a page later this is followed by a less flattering notice: "The fact was, every one cared more about *her*. She was a nice unassuming 'Jeanie-Deans'-looking body — and, if not handsome, certainly not ill-looking. Her conversation was as quiet as herself; no one would have guessed she could write her name. Whereas her father talked, not as if he could write nothing else, but as if nothing else were worth writing."

Hardly less lively is the account of the same party to be found in a letter of Joanna Baillie to Sir Walter Scott: —

"If *you* would give a silver sixpence, as you say, to see us together, each of us would, I am sure, have given a silver crown (no small part, now, of the real cash contained in anybody's purse) to have seen you a third in our party. I have found Miss Edgeworth a frank, animated, sensible, and amusing woman, entirely free from affectation of any kind, and of a confiding and affectionate, and friendly disposition that has gained upon my heart. We met a good many times, and when we parted she was in tears, like one who takes leave of an old friend. She has been received by everybody, the first in literature and the first in rank, with the most gratifying eagerness and respect, and has delighted them all. She is cheerful, and talks easily and fluently, and tells her little story (when her father did not take it out of her mouth) very pleasantly. However, in regard to her father, she is not

so much hampered as she must have been in Edinburgh, where I was told she could not get leave to speak to anybody, and therefore kept in the background wherever she went. When they take up the same thing now they have a fair wrangle (tho' a good-humoured one) for it, and she as often gets the better as he. He is, to be sure, a strange mortal, with no great 'tact,' and some conceit. Yet his daughter is so strongly attached to him that I am sure he must have some good in him; and, convinced of this, I have taken a good will to him in spite of fashion. You would have been amused if you had seen with what eagerness people crowded to get a sight of Miss Edgeworth — who is very short — peeping over shoulders and between curled *têtes* to get but one look. She said herself, at a party where I met her, that the crowd closed over her."

If she said so, it was, we may be sure, in no bragging spirit! Never lion or lioness took his or her social glory more completely at its proper value than did Maria Edgeworth. From her own letters written at this time, it would puzzle any one to extract a word with regard to this excitement over herself, about which the letters of her contemporaries almost audibly buzz. She tells the correspondents left behind in Ireland a good deal about Mr. Edgeworth's success as one of the speakers at a meeting of the Lancastrian schools, where his speech was "the next best to Lord Lansdowne's." Also about the inevitable "wheel carriages," and about the regrets of the whole party at missing both Madame D'Arblay and Madame de Staël, but of her own literary and social triumphs not a word. That she enjoyed everything to the full; that she came and went; laughed, talked, breakfasted, dined, supped; listened, and was listened to, all alike with zest and entertainment, is at least clear. Dull would be the biographer who failed to feel a certain reflected

glow over the thought of such enjoyment! Not the least regrettable amongst the world's many mischances is the failure of those in whom we take an interest to enjoy — or to *have* enjoyed — that meed of praise and admiration, not alone their due, but which the world was actually ready and eager to offer them. Who can read, for instance, without a pang of how, day after day, and for many weary months, Charlotte Brontë sat alone in melancholy Haworth — her sisters dead, her father preferring his own company, herself eating her poor meals uncheered by even the companionship of that least sympathetic of parents — while all the time, not very far away, fame, friends, admiration, sympathy, were waiting for her to come and to accept them? Let us rate all such opportunities as low as ever we like, still, when we have proved our superiority by rating them at the lowest possible point, something remains; something which, while the world spins, and man continues to be the arbiter — in such matters the sole arbiter — of his fellow-man, can never be without some value.

CHAPTER X

ENNUI — THE ABSENTEE — ORMOND

What is likely to be the final position of Miss Edgeworth as a writer, especially as a writer of Irish books? That is a question which sooner or later must confront her biographers; it appears to be high time, therefore, to enter a little more fully into an account of those three books of hers which are, after *Castle Rackrent* — in my judgment some way after it — her chief contributions to literature, and her chief claim consequently to an abiding position as author.

It happens that the words "Irish books," "Irish writers," are just now surrounded by a certain amount of ambiguity. It seems safer, therefore, to explain that by the latter phrase is meant in the present instance writers of Irish nationality who have written in the English language. To discuss at large, and with becoming seriousness, whether that language is or is not likely to be the one in which the genius of Ireland will in future reveal itself, would be irrelevant, and possibly disputatious. Looking at the matter then solely from an English-speaking point of view, I find myself confronted by another and a larger problem, the problem of how it happens that the literature of a country, whose sons and daughters are notoriously keen-witted and imaginative, should still

be comparatively so meagre? To find a satisfactory answer to that problem, as to most of those propounded to us by the scornful Sphinx, would take some time, since, before even beginning upon it, it would be necessary that the ground should be first cleared by a good deal of preliminary investigation. Swift, Burke, Sheridan, Goldsmith — to take the eighteenth century only — are a quartette of names of which any literature in the world might be proud. With the partial exception of the first-named it happens that only the smallest portion of the writings of any of these four have any marked connection with Ireland, consequently that peculiar and very endearing link, which usually more or less unites a writer with the soil from which he springs, is in all four cases regrettably absent. Why it is so, and how it has chanced, that, save in a few instances, Ireland herself has had so little of the attention of her best sons, is another question, or another branch of the same question. Considerations of geography, of history, of religion, all are entangled in it; the relations of two conflicting, and not very sympathetic races, and the further consideration of how far one such race may have a stunting and a deteriorating influence upon another — these, and various other points, would have to be gone over and debated, more or less in detail.

Want of space — as well as other considerations — forbid the interpolation of any similar discussions at the present moment. Turning back to the more immediate matter in hand, I find that before entering upon an examination of the three books whose names stand at the head of this chapter, it will be necessary to bestow a certain amount of attention upon

one or two earlier books of Miss Edgeworth, which have been somewhat unceremoniously passed over. Of these, the *Moral Tales* was published as far back as the year 1801, and was heralded and introduced to the world by a preface from the pen of Mr. Edgeworth, one in which the obvious is explained, and the evident is made clear, with all his usual elaborate and pitiless exactitude. As regards the book itself, all that one can say of it is that it is as little dull as any work of fiction can hope to be of which edification is the main, it is hardly too much to say, the sole reason for its existence. Personally, my favourite amongst the stories it contains is "Angelina, or l'amie inconnue," a tale which relates, with many sparks of humour, the adventures of a sentimental young lady in pursuit of an unknown friend and correspondent, whom she goes forth to seek in a romantic situation amid the mountains of North Wales, but unhappily discovers at Bristol, and in a condition of — semi-intoxication! The other stories seem to me to be most of them upon a duller plane, and the chief impression produced by a re-perusal of them is one of no little perplexity that a pen which had only just left off from writing *Castle Rackrent* should have been able to turn — to all appearances with equal satisfaction — to the production of *Forester*, or of *The Prussian Vase.*

After the "Moral" came the "Popular" tales, which are even more obviously and avowedly educational. "The Young," "The Middle Classes," "The Aristocracy," appears to have been the primitive form of classification adopted, and to each of these three classes a certain number of fables, each with their due admixture of morals, had to be directed. As regards the tales

themselves, they are at once so simple, and so well known, that elaborate analysis would in their case be the merest superfluity. Whenever Ireland, or even a wandering Irishman, steps upon the stage — as in *The Limerick Gloves* — they seem to me at once to gain in vigour and actuality — but that may be pure prejudice! In any case, I fail to see any adequate reason for delaying over their contemplation, and therefore pass on to the *Fashionable Tales*, the first series of which was begun not long after the return of Miss Edgeworth from Paris, namely, in the summer of the year 1803.

This series contained as its longest story *Ennui*, which being in the main Irish, I have set aside to discuss separately. The rest of the volumes were filled in the first edition by the four following tales — *The Dun*, *Manœuvring*, *Mme. de Fleury*, and *Almeria*. Here again the impression conveyed is that they are, from a literary point of view, so emphatically below Miss Edgeworth at her best, that they may safely be left to be summarised in the words of the parental preface. From that conscientious editorial summary we learn that *The Dun* is intended by its author to be — "a lesson against the common folly of believing that a debtor is able by a few cant phrases to alter the nature of right and wrong." *Manœuvring* is — "a vice to which the little great have recourse to show their second-rate abilities"; while in *Almeria* the author, we are assured, proposes to give us — "a view of the consequences which usually follow the substitution of the gifts of fortune in the place of merit, and shows the meanness of those who imitate manners and haunt company above their station in society." "Difference of rank," Mr. Edgeworth continues impressively, "is a

continual incitement to laudable emulation; but those who consider the being admitted into circles of fashion as the summit of human bliss and elevation, will here find how grievously such frivolous ambition may be disappointed and chastised."

After so judicious and so thoroughly exhaustive a summary as this, the reader will perhaps hardly feel that it is requisite for his peace of mind to know very much more! It is only common justice to Miss Edgeworth, however, to add that the tales are one and all of them written with that liveliness and vigour which rarely, even at the worst, forsook her pen. There is one scene especially, towards the end of *Almeria*, — the scene in which a wealthy and fashionable "Miss" (Almeria herself) encounters a high-minded but unfashionable duchess — which has always seemed to the present writer to promise a large amount of entertainment to its readers. Unhappily, the desire to chastise the poor votary of fashion, in accordance with the spirit of the preface, has proved too strong for the natural humours of the situation. The rich, but reprehensibly fashionable, "Miss" retires abashed and humiliated — although in her own coach — leaving all the honours of war to the high-minded but unfashionable duchess, who departs shortly afterwards in triumph — apparently upon her feet!

The second set of the *Fashionable Tales* finally included *The Absentee*, which is, next to *Castle Rackrent*, the best story, in the opinion of most critics, that Miss Edgeworth ever wrote. Its inclusion was, as will shortly be seen, of the nature of an afterthought, the series, as originally projected, having been almost exclusively English. As regards two of the stories

contained in it — *Vivian* and *The Modern Griselda* — I do not find it easy to discover anything very favourable to say. This applies more especially to *Vivian*, a painfully ponderous tale, the moral of which turns upon the disadvantage under which a hero labours who is incapable under any circumstances of saying "No." The third of these shorter stories — *Émilie de Coulanges* — stands upon a very different level, and is perhaps the best non-Irish story that its author ever penned. The heroine, it is true, is of the usual flawless type, as is also apparently the hero, who only appears in a somewhat unconvincing fashion at the last moment. On the other hand, the two mothers — his and Émilie's — are a pair of admirably conceived contrasts. The volatile Countess — unsobered even under the very shadow of the guillotine — is as lifelike a creation as has ever fluttered through the pages of a novel, while Mrs. Somers — hospitable, strenuous, well-meaning, generous, the possessor of many virtues and of one failing — huffiness — is a person with whom most of us have at one time or other made acquaintance. While fully admitting the good points of this and several of the other shorter stories, I still find it difficult to believe that any devout reader of Miss Edgeworth can fail to regret that she should have expended so much of her time upon what was for her — I will not assert for *every one* — distinctly the wrong side of the Channel. I therefore pass on to those three books of hers which are more particularly the objects of my own interest, and proceed now to examine them a little in detail.

Taking them, not chronologically, but in their order of merit, the first place will be almost universally

assigned to *The Absentee*. While personally ranking it, as I have said, considerably below its forerunner *Castle Rackrent*, it is impossible for any critic to fail to realise that it is in truth an excellent tale, full of wit and humour, full of point, pith, and knowledge of the world, of nearly, in short, though not perhaps of all, the qualities which go towards the production of that as yet unrealised desideratum — the ideal novel. Every one, it is to be hoped, has read or heard of Lord Macaulay's solemn declaration that the scene in which Lord Colambre discovers himself to his father's tenants, and discomfits the demon agent, has had no parallel in literature since the opening of the twenty-second book of the *Odyssey!* Humbler admirers might hardly perhaps have risen unaided to quite such lofty heights of panegyric as these. Still, when the vast, the almost immeasurable difference, between a new and a merely old novel has been discounted, the result can hardly fail to redound to the permanent distinction of its author.

The fashion in which the book originated has a certain interest in itself, and shows that Miss Edgeworth, like most people who have ever written novels, had now and then turned an eye to the more immediate profits and glories of the stage. She never actually attained those glories; indeed in this, as in most other respects, she took an unusually clear, no less than an unusually modest, view of her own capacities. The first mention of *The Absentee* will be found in a letter to her unfailing correspondent, Mrs. Ruxton: — "I have written a little play for our present large juvenile audience," — this was written in November 1811 — "not for them to act, but to hear. I read it out last night,

and it was liked. The scene is in Ireland, and the title *The Absentee*. When will you let me read it to you? I would rather read it to you up in a garret than to the most brilliant audience in Christendom."

With this play, as read to him by its author, Mr. Edgeworth was, it appears, so enchanted that he insisted — strongly against the advice of its writer — upon sending it off at once to Sheridan, and endeavouring, under his protection, to let it try its fate upon the London boards. Remonstrance was vain. The affectionate parental despot must and would have his own way. The play accordingly was despatched to Sheridan within a few hours of its being written. "It was copied," Mrs. Edgeworth tells us in her *Memoir*, "in a single night. We all sat round the library table, and, each taking a portion, it was completed by twelve o'clock, in eight different handwritings."

In spite of the enjoyment of having to decipher eight different handwritings at a sitting, the manager proved obdurate! In her next letter Miss Edgeworth writes as follows: — "Sheridan has answered, as I foresaw he *must*, that in the present state of this country the Lord Chamberlain would not licence *The Absentee*. Besides, there would be a difficulty in finding actors for so many Irish characters. I like him all the better for being so entirely of *my* opinion."

If she "liked him all the better" for refusing her play, one can only say that she differed from the great majority of playwrights or would-be playwrights. That Sheridan's verdict was final even Mr. Edgeworth was forced in any case to admit. Messrs. Johnson, the publishers, had been clamouring for a fresh series of the *Tales from Fashionable Life*, and it was decided,

therefore, to throw over *Patronage*, — another undeniably ponderous effort, which had grown up under her father's auspices — and to add *The Absentee* to the rest of the stories already collecting for that series.

Turning for information to Mrs. Edgeworth's *Memoir* of her stepdaughter, we find her writing as follows: —

"The idea of Irish absentees living in London had originally formed part of *Patronage*, where a Lord and Lady Tipperary appeared as patients of Dr. Percy's. *Patronage* had been intended to have formed part of a second series of *Fashionable Tales*, along with *Vivian* and *Émilie de Coulanges*, but finding it impossible to finish it in two volumes, and Mr. Miles (Johnson's successor) being anxious to publish the second set of *Tales from Fashionable Life* early in the ensuing year, Mr. Edgeworth advised Maria to lay aside *Patronage* for the present, and taking out of it the Irish absentees, make a story that would fill the volume and a half wanted for the series. She was pleased with the idea, wrote a sketch of the story, of which her father approved, changed the name of Tipperary to Clonbrony, and now set to work at *The Absentee*."

In this manner the book grew, and the haste at which it had to be produced was not perhaps as disadvantageous to it as to most works of art, seeing that the very fact of such haste precluded the eternal re-adjustments, interpolations, moral disquisitions, and so forth, which it was the peculiar function of her Editor in Chief to supply. Although enlivened by Lady Clonbrony's aspirations after London society, the first volume of *The Absentee* does not differ greatly from some of Miss Edgeworth's other "fashionable tales." The real interest of the story only begins when the hero, Lord Colambre, setting forth upon his travels, undertakes to explore what were for him as yet *terræ incognitæ* — his father's estates, namely, in Ireland.

The theory that Miss Edgeworth had gained, rather than lost, by her own acquaintance with that country having been so long postponed, is one which I have myself already disputed. At the same time, honesty forces the avowal that the idea of an Ireland visited for the first time in mature years by an Irishman or half-Irishman, was evidently one which had stamped itself strongly upon her consciousness, and so far the opposite theory gains support. Not only in *The Absentee*, but also in the earlier story, *Ennui*, we find the same situation occurring, although the details in each case vary not a little. In the last-named book the hero is an opulent nobleman — rather has the semblance of being one, for, as a matter of fact, we know that he was "changed at nurse." Apart from his Irish possessions, Lord Glenthorn was the proprietor of sundry estates in England, also of a London house, and of all else appropriate to the sort of person apt to be rhetorically described as "a belted Earl." He had been married to an heiress, and had found a speedy occasion to divorce her — retaining apparently her possessions. He had squandered a couple of fortunes of his own at the gaming-table, where the scale of his operations may be judged by his remarking upon his own good fortune in having upon one particular night only lost "a mere trifle, ten thousand pounds." As the natural, or at all events as the moral, result of these feats, he was consumed by the painful malady which gives its name to the book, and it was in the hope of dissipating the anguish occasioned by it that he suddenly decided upon keeping a promise made to his old Irish nurse (in reality his mother), and setting forth to visit his ancestral possessions in Ireland.

As became a person of his importance, he of course travelled in his own coach, with his own horses, and his own coachman to drive them. He had neglected, however, to supply a second coach and more horses for his retainers, and the result was that they were forced . . . But Lord Glenthorn shall here explain matters for himself: —

"My own man (an Englishman) and my cook (a Frenchman) followed in a hackney chaise; I cared not how, so that they kept up with me; the rest was their affair. At night, my gentleman complained bitterly of the Irish post carriages, and besought me to let him follow at an easier rate the next day, but to this I could by no means consent, for how could I exist without my own man and my French cook? In the morning, just as I was ready to set off, and had thrown myself back in the carriage, my Englishman and Frenchman came to the door, both in so great a rage, that the one was inarticulate and the other unintelligible. At length the object of their indignation spoke for itself. From the inn yard came a hackney chaise, in a most deplorable crazy state; the body mounted up to a prodigious height, on unbending springs, nodding forwards, one door swinging open, three blinds up, because they could not be let down, the perch tied in two places, the iron of the wheels half off, half loose, wooden pegs for linch-pins, and ropes for harness. The horses were worthy of the harness: wretched little dog-tired creatures, that looked as if they had been driven to the last gasp, and as if they had never been rubbed down in their lives. . . .

"In an indignant voice I called to the landlord, 'I hope these are not the horses — I hope this is not the chaise, intended for my servants?'

"The innkeeper, and the pauper who was preparing to officiate as postillion, both in the same instant exclaimed, 'Sorrow better chaise in the county!'

"'Sorrow!' said I; 'what do you mean by sorrow?'

"'That there's no better, plase your honour, can be seen. We have two more, to be sure; but one has no top, and the

other no bottom. Any way, there 's no better can be seen than this same.'

"'And these horses!' cried I; 'why, this horse is so lame he can hardly stand.'

"'Oh, plase your honour, tho' he can't stand, he 'll *go* fast enough. He has a great deal of the rogue in him, plase your honour. He 's always that way at first setting out.'

". . . I could not avoid smiling, but my gentleman, maintaining his angry gravity, declared, in a sullen tone, that he would be cursed if he went with such horses; and the Frenchman, with abundance of gesticulation, made a prodigious chattering, which no mortal understood.

"'Then I 'll tell you what you 'll do,' said Paddy; 'you 'll take four, as becomes gentlemen of your quality, and you 'll see how we 'll powder along.'

"And straight he put the knuckle of his fore-finger in his mouth, and whistled shrill and strong; and, in a moment, a whistle somewhere out in the fields answered him.

"I protested against these proceedings, but in vain; before the first pair of horses were fastened to the chaise, up came a little boy with the others fresh from the plough. They were quick enough in putting these to; yet how they managed it with their tackle, I know not. 'Now we 're fixed handsomely,' said Paddy.

"'But this chaise will break down the first mile.'

"'Is it this chaise, plase your honour? I 'll engage it will go the world's end. The universe wouldn't break it down now; sure it was mended but last night. . . .'

"At last, by dint of whipping, the four horses were compelled to set off in a lame gallop; but they stopped short at a hill near the end of the town, whilst a shouting troop of ragged boys followed, and pushed them fairly to the top. Half an hour afterwards, as we were putting on our drag-chain to go down another steep hill — to my utter astonishment, Paddy, with his horses in full gallop, came rattling and chehupping past us. My people called to warn him that he had no drag; but still he cried 'Never fear!' and shaking the long reins, and stamping with his foot, on he went thundering down the hill. My Englishmen were aghast.

"'The turn yonder below, at the bottom of the hill, is as sharp and ugly as ever I see,' said my postillion, after a moment's stupefied silence. 'He will break their necks, as sure as my name is John.'

"Quite the contrary: when we had dragged and undragged, and came up with Paddy, we found him safe on his legs, mending some of his tackle very quietly.

"'If that had broke as you were going down the steep hill,' said I, 'it would have been all over with you, Paddy.'

"'That 's true, plase your honour: but it never happened me going down hill — nor never will, by the blessing of God, if I 've any luck.'"

The Absentee is in like manner taken up with expounding the effect likely to have been produced upon an intelligent stranger by the Ireland of that day. Unlike the more imposing progress of his predecessor, Lord Colambre's first visit to his father's estates is made in very humble guise. He travels "incog.," as we might suppose some heir-apparent to visit the Kingdom which he hopes to inherit. His first night is spent under the roof of a neighbouring agent, one of Miss Edgeworth's painfully immaculate characters, but in this case justifiably so, seeing that he has to serve as a contrast to all the other agents of the book. The second night Lord Colambre sleeps in a cabin belonging to the widow O'Neill, the mother of one of his father's tenants, who has recently been cheated out of her poor rights by the demoniacal "St. Denis," and was destined to be further cheated out of them under his own eyes upon the following day. Here the best specimen short enough for quotation is perhaps the letter of the local car-driver Larry Brady, to his brother in London, which forms a sort of postscript to the book. Larry is urging his brother to return home to Clonbrony,

seeing that the all-potent "masther" is once more installed there, and that the Millennium is evidently just about to begin!

"Ogh, it 's I driv' 'em well; and we all got to the great gate of the park before sunset, and as fine an evening as ever you see; with the sun shining on the tops of the trees, as the ladies noticed; the leaves changed, but not dropped, though so late in the season. I believe the leaves knew what they were about, and kept on, on purpose to welcome them. And the birds were singing, and I stopped whistling, that they might hear them, but sorrow bit could they hear when they got to the park gate, for there was such a crowd, and such a shout as you never see — and they had the horses off every carriage entirely, and drew 'em home, with blessings, through the park. And God bless 'em! when they got out, they didn't go shut themselves up in the great drawing-room, but went straight out to the tirrass, to satisfy the eyes and hearts that followed them.

". . . After a turn or two upon the tirrass, my Lord Colambre quit his mother's arm for a minute, and he come to the edge of the slope, and looked down and through the crowd for some one.

"'Is it the widow O'Neill, my lord?' says I; 'she 's yonder, with the spectacles on her nose, betwixt her son and daughter, as usual.'

"Then my lord beckoned, and they did not know which of the tree would stir; and then he gave tree beckons with his own finger, and they all tree came fast enough to the bottom of the slope forenent my lord; and he went down and helped the widow up (Oh, he 's the true jantleman), and brought 'em all tree up on the tirrass, to my lady and Miss Nugent; and I was close up after, that I might hear, which wasn't manners, but I couldn't help it. So what he said I don't well know, for I could not get near enough, after all. But I saw my lady smile very kind, and take the widow O'Neill by the hand, and then my Lord Colambre 'troduced Grace to Miss Nugent, and there was the word 'namesake,' and something about a check curtain, but, whatever it was, they was all

greatly pleased. Then my Lord Colambre turned and looked for Brian, who had fell back, and took him with some commendation to my lord his father. And my old lord the master said — which I didn't know till after — that they should have their house and farm at the ould rent; and at the surprise, the widow dropped down dead; and there was a cry as for ten berrings. 'Be qui'te,' says I, 'she 's only kilt for joy.' And I went and lift her up, for her son had no more strength that minute than the child new-born; and Grace trembled like a leaf, as white as the sheet, but not long, for the mother came to, and was as well as ever, when I brought some water, which Miss Nugent handed to her with her own hand."

These, alas, are all the extracts which the scale of this book will admit of, and I must only hope that they may send its readers flying to their shelves in search of more. To assume that Miss Edgeworth's books, even her Irish books, are intimately known to the reading public of to-day, would, I fear, be rash; but to assert that they *ought* to be known is assuredly not so: indeed for Irish readers their value may be said to have increased rather than diminished by the lapse of time. In fiction, as in poetry, we all to a great degree find what we bring, and there is a great deal of uncommonly pregnant matter for reflection to be found in these century-old books. Under their guidance we seem to be gazing down a long and remarkably steep incline, the lowest portion of which has only been attained in our own day. The position of an Irish landlord a century ago was extraordinarily different, it must be remembered, from the position of his equals and contemporaries across the Channel. It was a position which had come down to him from early days, the holders of which had indeed changed — changed often both in race and in creed —

but who still substantially represented their predecessors, and stood in much the same sort of relationship to those around them. The old Irish proverb, "Spend me, and defend me," expresses pretty clearly what that relationship was, or, rather, what it had originally been intended to be. That it was a wholesome or a dignified relationship, especially at so late a date as we are considering, it would be rash to assert, although this much may be said in its favour, that it allowed more of the personal, and consequently of the human, element, than has always been found in more self-respecting ties.

The real fatality, the underlying curse of the whole system, lay in its exceptional liability to abuse. Whenever the enormous powers — traditional even more than legal — of an owner came to be delegated, there, without doubt, abuses grew to be the rule rather than the exception. By no one have the vices of the system been exposed with a more vigorous hand, or the lash laid more unsparingly upon the right shoulders, than by Miss Edgeworth herself, daughter and descendant of Irish landlords though she was. But that the limits of quotation have already been somewhat recklessly exceeded, I should be tempted to turn back here to *Castle Rackrent*, seeing that in it alone, of all Miss Edgeworth's books, do we find those qualities of brevity, force, and effectiveness which are the most essential of all for a successful quotation. In the three books under consideration, the treatment is, perhaps inevitably, at once looser, less superficially humorous, yet in reality less cogent, and even less tragical, than the peculiar concentration and brevity of her earlier story made possible. They are also, to a greater or less degree,

infected with that conscientious desire after a particularly irritating form of edification, of which, amongst all Miss Edgeworth's books, *Castle Rackrent* alone stands absolutely free.

In the latest of her Irish stories — *Ormond* — we meet with what are perhaps the two best and most lifelike character-pictures which our author ever drew. Even the hero is in this case more of a possible young man, and less of a mere peg to hang edifying sentiments upon, than is common with her, or with perhaps the majority of novelists. The two great personages, however, of the book are of course "King Condy," the good-hearted, despotic, claret-drinking sovereign of the Black Islands, and his relative and rival in the affections of the hero, Sir Ulick O'Shane. In the first-named we have a figure which may fairly be placed alongside of the Antiquary, or of the Baron of Bradwardine. Like them he belonged to a nearly extinct type, a type which even at the time it was painted was already vanishing from the stage, and in another dozen years or so would have become an impossibility. His kinsman, and special aversion, the scheming, wheedling politician, Sir Ulick, is also an admirable portrait, and is depicted with more subtlety than was usual with Miss Edgeworth. Here the difficulty in abstaining from quotation is less, seeing that it would be difficult to find any extract short enough not to be spoilt by condensation. I therefore content myself with the following excellent little bit of rhymed epigram, descriptive of Sir Ulick's methods of vindicating his patriotism: —

> "To serve in Parliament the nation,
> Sir Ulick read his recantation:

At first he joined the patriot throng,
But soon perceiving he was wrong,
He ratted to the courtier tribe,
Bought by a title and a bribe;
But how that new-found friend to bind
With any oath — of any kind —
Disturb'd the premier's wary mind.
Upon his faith. — 'Upon his word.'
Oh! that, my friend, is too absurd.
'Upon his honour.' — Quite a jest.
'Upon his conscience.' — No such test.
'By all he has on earth.' — 'Tis gone.
'By all his hopes of heav'n.' — They 're none.
'How then secure him in our pay,
He can't be trusted for a day?'
How? — When you want the fellow's throat,
Pay by the job, — you have his vote."

For Miss Edgeworth herself *Ormond* had always a peculiar though a very melancholy interest, from the fact of its having been written during the concluding months of her father's life — indeed the printing had to be pushed forward, so that it might reach Edgeworthstown while he was still alive, and able to enjoy the satisfaction of having it read to him by its author.

Such small gibes as the mention of his name have now and then irresistibly called forth, sink naturally to decent silence as one stands before the closing scene of what was in all essentials so respectworthy a life. The picture of the old patriarch upon his seventy-first birthday, surrounded for the last time by his well-nigh countless children and other relations, occupying all the chairs in the room, and sitting about on stools at his feet, has been preserved for us by Maria Edgeworth herself. It will be found in a letter to her cousin Sophy Ruxton: —

"He could not dine with us, but after dinner he sent for us all into the library. He sat in the armchair, by the fire, my mother in the opposite armchair, Pakenham in the chair behind her, Francis on a stool at her feet, Maria beside them; William next; Lucy, Sneyd, on the sofa behind the fire, as when you were here; Honora, Fanny, Harriet, and Sophy; my aunts next to my father, and Lovell between them and the sofa. He was much pleased at Lovell and Sneyd coming down for this day."

A fortnight later, upon June 13, 1817, Mr. Edgeworth died. What the loss of him meant to his own family was succinctly expressed by his widow in the memoir of her stepdaughter — "The rest of that year was a blank."

CHAPTER XI

MEMOIR OF R. L. EDGEWORTH — THE *QUARTERLY* — PARIS — GENEVA

The death of her father was for Miss Edgeworth one of those turning-points in life which never leave the mind exactly as it had been before. Her powers of rebound were considerable, and her natural good spirits after a time returned, but we can see the traces of this sorrow up to the very end of her life. Nor is there anything surprising in this. Exasperating as was his interference with what, in our judgment, lay wholly outside his province, it would be unjust not to realise that the peculiar and very charming link which has so often united a daughter to a father has on the whole rarely found a better exemplification than in their case. Exceptionally open as she was to all the ties of affection, it is nevertheless evident that for Miss Edgeworth her father stood head and shoulders above every other object of affection whom she had ever known, or was ever destined to know. Now he was gone, and for a long time it seemed as if life itself was scarcely conceivable without him.

She had a physical discomfort which added to her other sources of depression. Her eyes had again become extremely painful. She told one of her relations that the tears, when she shed them, "cut like a knife," and

she was not given to exaggerated expressions about herself. What at length, though not until after a considerable interval, roused her from her depression was the necessity under which she felt herself to lie of preparing this adored father's Memoirs for publication, a task to which she settled resolutely, as soon as her eyes had sufficiently recovered to make it possible.

It was an almost hopelessly difficult one, all the more because Mr. Edgeworth — changing his mind apparently at the last moment — had, as his dying injunction, left orders that his own share of the work was to be printed intact, with all its errors, inaccuracies, and solecisms, exactly as he had left it. The second volume was Miss Edgeworth's contribution to the work, and may be called the chief, no less than the last, tribute of devotion paid by her to her father, and for that very reason will never, unfortunately, be anything but a source of considerable discomfort to her admirers. So completely did she in writing it subordinate her own style to his, that she achieved what, without such an unmistakable piece of evidence, one would have been inclined to believe impossible — she succeeded in becoming excessively dull! In this undertaking she may be said to have actually surpassed her model, for Mr. Edgeworth's own autobiography is undoubtedly very much less dull than is the continuation by his daughter. The flood of anecdote with which this first portion is enlivened, as well as the intense — I may say contagious — exultation over his own achievements, which overflows the whole of it, would alone keep it from that reproach. In the second volume not only are the anecdotes fewer, but admiration for the subject of the book — no longer enlivened and made piquant by inno-

cent vanity — becomes ponderous, and of the nature of an *éloge funèbre*, or solemn and wearisome panegyric.

That her own anxiety upon the subject was great is evident, and not, as has been shown, unnatural. As the book began to approach completion she grew eager to obtain some opinion upon it, more critical than the family circle could be expected to furnish. Her own and her father's friend, M. Dumont, was about to pay a lengthened visit to Bowood, and Lord and Lady Lansdowne wrote urgently, indeed affectionately, to beg of her to meet him there. This she agreed to do, and in the autumn of 1818, a year and a half after her father's death, she, for the first time since that event, left Ireland, taking with her her young half-sister, Honora. They reached Bowood upon the 7th of September.

From the description given to her relations, Bowood seems to have been quite the right house for an ardent worker to pay a visit in! Immediately after breakfast the whole party are described by Miss Edgeworth as separating, each to his or her several tasks, and not being expected to meet again until luncheon time. Writing to her stepmother she is able presently to assure her that M. Dumont is greatly pleased with her father's manuscript — that is to say with the first volume, the autobiography. "He hates Mr. Day," the letter goes on — "in spite of all his good qualities. He says he knows 'he could not bear that sort of man, who has such pride and misanthropies about trifles, raising a great theory of morals upon an *amour blessé*.'" Lady Lansdowne is reported, on the other hand, to "admire and love Mr. Day as much as Dumont disliked him," an expression of opinion which it is permissible to set

down rather to a friendly desire to please her guest, than to any very serious effort at criticism.

À propos of Mr. Day, an unpublished letter of this date is extant which gives a lively account of an expedition in search of a former residence of his. It seems to be worth inserting, if only as a proof that Miss Edgeworth was beginning once more to enjoy life, and to enter into its various incidents large or small: —

"We had a pleasant drive while at Epping with Mr. Lestock Wilson, to look for Mr. Day's old house. We stopped at cottages to inquire, but no man under forty knew more than that there had been such a person. Mr. Wilson was going to get down to inquire, and offered to leave the reins in my hands, to which I objected with an earnestness that diverted him and Honora much. At last we found a gentleman who was proud to tell us that the fee simple of the property, formerly Mr. Day's, was now his; a farmer Ainsworth now occupied the house. I had described the place to my companions, and as we drove up, missing the wood, and seeing a house quite unlike what I remembered, I thought it could not be the right place; but as we got to the top of the hill, the wood discovered itself below. I got out, and crossed the dirty road, in spite of a dog barking, and springing to the length of his chain. A woman and children appeared, staring as if stuck through with amazement. Then a charming old grey-headed man, leaning on crutches, but with ruddy cheeks and smooth forehead, and fine dark eyes, which lighted up and sparkled with pleasure and affection, when I mentioned the name of Day.

"'Day! know him? ay, sure I do, and have good reason for to do; for very good he was to me. Please to walk in!' — pointing with his crutch. 'The house he lived in was all pulled down, every bit, except yon brick wall.'

"We went in, and he seated himself in his elbow-chair by the kitchen fire, as you will see in Honora's sketch of him.

"'Oh! Mr. Day was a good man, and did a power of good to the poorer sort. I was one of his day's-men at first, and then he helped me on; and when he was tired of this here place, and wanted to settle at his other place, he offered me this; but I said, "Sir, I am not able for it," and he said, "But, Ainsworth, if I help you a bit, you 'll then be able, won't you?"'

"It was quite touching to me to hear the manner in which this worthy old man spoke of Mr. Day. I asked him if he remembered the servant Mr. Day had who ploughed the sandy field sixteen times?

"'George Bristow! Oh, ay, I remember him; an honest, good servant he was!'

"'He is now our servant.'

"'Why, I thought he went to live with a family in Ireland?'

"'So he did — with our family.'

"'Oh, you comes from Ireland?'

"So much for Farmer Ainsworth!"

Upon the same day, or the one following, Miss Edgeworth paid a visit to Mrs. Barbauld at Stoke Newington. Cheerful as she seemed to strangers, it is evident that the blow she had received still ached. In the following extract from a letter to her step-

mother descriptive of that visit, there is a sense of the weariness, the underlying desolateness of life, very rare in one of her essentially light-hearted and unintrospective temperament: —

"We waited some time before she" (Mrs. Barbauld) "appeared, and I had leisure to recollect everything that could make me melancholy — the very sofa that, you will remember, you and my father sat on. I was quite *undone* before she came in, but was forced to get through with it. She was gratified with our visit, and very kind and agreeable. Opposite to me sat Miss Hammond; I asked for her brother, who is well; and I felt as if I had lived three lives — as if I had lived a hundred years, and was left alive after everybody else."

Another, and a more cheerful visit, paid about the same date, was to Joanna Baillie. We have a lively picture of the still older authoress and one of her sisters "running down their little paved path" to meet their visitors. A few days later the two Miss Edgeworths returned to Bowood, but this second visit was marred by the sudden and tragic death of Sir Samuel Romilly, an event which was a source of such evidently acute sorrow to both Lord and Lady Lansdowne, that they considerately shortened their visit in order to leave them alone.

After leaving Bowood for the second time Miss Edgeworth paid a visit to her connections the Sneyds, and there set to work diligently at the *Memoir*, fortified by M. Dumont's general approval of it, and endeavouring, so far as was possible, to carry out his various criticisms. She does not seem to have returned to Ireland at all that year, but remained on in England till the following summer, paying a visit of some months at Berkeley Lodge, where her two Sneyd

aunts had temporarily taken up their quarters with a brother. By the March following we hear that "the first part of the manuscript is in Hunter's hands," and before the end of that year the whole of it was completed, but Miss Edgeworth's own reluctance to publication was still strong, and the actual appearance of the book was delayed until the following Easter.

It is impossible not to sympathise with that hesitation. Indeed, if the postponement of the book had proved to be an eternal one, few critics would be prepared to say that the reputation of either the writer or subject of it would have suffered! Considering the whole tone of it; considering its flood of unstinted panegyric; considering the very ample openings which it afforded to criticism, especially as regards the first volume, it cannot be said that its reception was upon the whole other than friendly. In one case, but in one case only, the limits of fair criticism were unquestionably surpassed, and it is satisfactory to believe that this particular notice never met the eyes which it has every appearance of having been especially aimed at. The review in the *Quarterly* was couched in that peculiar style of unctuous piety which seems then, and for many years, to have been the special pride and glory of that review. Little doubt is allowed to rest upon the minds of its readers — one of which readers it was clearly hoped might be Mr. Edgeworth's own daughter — as to the destiny to which the subject of the *Memoir* in question had laid himself open. After a lengthened exposition of Mr. Edgeworth's opinions, real or supposed, "We wish," the reviewer goes on to observe, "that we could add that

they" — *i.e.* the opinions — "gave us any reason to hope that they were founded in a spirit of Christian confidence. We regret to say that they do not. Moreover Mr. Edgeworth's life leads us to fear that the omissions of all expressions of devoutness in the productions of him and his daughter arise, neither from an opinion of their being extraneous to the subject, nor yet from accident, but . . ." etc., etc.

Further on in the same article Miss Edgeworth is personally and with inquisitorial solemnity adjured to lift a load from off the reviewer's soul, and at the same time to clear, if by any possibility she can do so, the guilt which rests upon that of her father. "Three words may yet clear up the difficulty" — so runs this amazing paragraph — "and if Miss Edgeworth is able in her next work to say '*My father was a Christian*,' she will do a pious office to his memory, no inconsiderable good to mankind, and *no one*" — let us sit down for a moment, and ponder upon the charity of this remark — "*no one* will be better pleased than we shall ourselves."

Even to the charity of a *Quarterly* reviewer there had, however, obviously to be limits, and a reprobation which would in that case have been somewhat lightened as regards the rank heathenism of Miss Edgeworth, would have had to be transferred to the score of her carelessness and inexcusable inaccuracy. After a dissertation pregnant with the very darkest misgivings as regards the fate of her father — "We shall rejoice," the reviewer concludes by saying, "if we find that her inaccurate modes of expression had confirmed us in an error into which her father's own avowals had originally led us."

Studying this attractive production, and reflecting, moreover, upon its evident animus, it is not easy for a biographer to set bounds to his or her indignation. We must, however, in fairness remember that the inquisitorial note, which to the taste of to-day reads like the worst and most gratuitous form of impertinence, was, at the time it was penned, indeed long afterwards, the rule rather than the exception, on the part of critics who considered themselves to be the guardians, not of religion only, but of morality and decency. Readers of Mr. Morley's recent life of Mr. Gladstone can hardly have failed to be startled by the fashion in which, long after his entrance into public life, Mr. Gladstone himself not alone excused, but upheld, similar inquiries into the most private opinions of political contemporaries. It must, moreover, be remembered that the dogmatic tone adopted by the Edgeworth circle — especially by Mr. Edgeworth himself — was hardly less provocative, and was even fuller of the joy and zeal of self-righteousness than that of his critic, and that to this extent the intended castigation may be said to have fallen not wholly inappropriately.

Happily, so far as Miss Edgeworth was concerned, the only effect of the vituperation seems to have been to awaken a vehement outburst of affectionate indignation on the part of all her friends. M. Dumont wrote to her from Geneva, entreating her not to read that "*infame article*" — "*cette attaque calomnieuse de la Quarterly Review.*" Other friends wrote in the same sense, and, what was perhaps more surprising, she seems to have had the strength of mind to decide from the first that she had no intention of reading it, and to have kept to that resolution.

It was a resolution which was the easier to keep to owing to the fact that, long before she could have been tempted to break it, she was already far from England, and her attention fully occupied by new scenes and interests. She had returned to Edgeworthstown in the course of the summer of 1819, and after about eight or nine months there, she started again in the April following, taking with her her two young sisters, Fanny and Harriet, all three bound this time for the Continent. It was the first occasion upon which Miss Edgeworth had crossed the Channel in a steamer, and the innovation did not apparently please her, since she compares the motion of it, oddly enough, to the effect made upon any one sitting in a carriage, by "a pig scratching itself against the hind wheel." Their Swiss friends, M. and Madame Moilliet, accompanied them as far as Calais, but hastened on from there to their home in Geneva, while the Edgeworth sisters pursued their way to Paris, arriving there on April the 29th, 1820.

From the very first moment of their appearance, that, often inconstant, capital seems to have opened its arms widely to them. "*Madame Maria Edgeworth et les demoiselles ses Sœurs*" became at once the fashion, more so apparently than the family had even previously been in London. Miss Edgeworth's own excellent French was a passport, and the Abbé Edgeworth — no longer a source of peril or suspicion — had by that time become the object of a special cult on the part of every faithful Royalist. Nearly all her former acquaintances seem to have been still alive, hardly the worse for the intervening eighteen years, and one and all eager to meet and to greet her again. Amongst the

warmest of her devotees seem to have been the whole of the French royal family. She tells her correspondents in Ireland that the Duchesse de Broglie, whom she met at the Embassy the very day after her arrival, was "quite tender." In fact, the attentions of the great at times became a trifle troublesome, and one of the few grumbles we find in her letters refers to a delightful conversation with Humboldt, in the course of which she was, she says, "twice called away to be introduced to Grandeurs, just as he had reached the most interesting point!" A lively account is given of a supper to which she and her sisters were invited by Cuvier, at the Collège de France, which they attained only after a drive of agony across the oldest part of the city. "Such streets! such turns! lamps strung at great distances; coach and cart men bawling *Ouais! Ouais!* etc." When at last their destination was reached — "Cuvier himself came down to the carriage door to receive us, and handed us up the narrow, difficult stairs." Upstairs they found themselves landed in a small room, filled apparently with all the talents. "Prony, as like an honest water-dog as ever; Biot (*'et moi aussi je suis père de famille'*), a fat, double volume of himself — I could not see a trace of the young *père de famille* we knew — round-faced, with a bald head, a few black ringlets, a fine-boned skull, on which the tortoise might fall without cracking it." Presently came tea and supper together. "Only two-thirds of the company could sit down, but the rest stood or sat behind, and were very happy. Biot sat behind Fanny's chair, and talked of the parallax and Dr. Brinkley. Prony, with his hair nearly in my plate, was telling entertaining anecdotes

of Buonaparte, while Cuvier, with his head nearly meeting him, was talking as hard as he could." Both of them assured her that Buonaparte "never could bear to have any answer but a decided answer." "One day," said Cuvier, "I nearly ruined myself by considering before I answered. He asked me, '*Faut-il introduire le sucre de betterave en France?*' '*D'abord, sire, il faut songer si vos colonies. . . .*' '*Faut-il avoir le sucre de betterave en France?*' '*Mais, Sire, il faut examiner. . . .*' '*Bah! Je le démanderai à Berthollet.*'"

Even before this memorable supper, Miss Edgeworth had hastened to pay a visit to Madame Récamier in her convent. Although less rich and prosperous than of yore, she seems to have been still surrounded by a remnant at least of her former Court. The ex-Queen of Sweden was there, having been invited on purpose to meet them. Of Madame Récamier. — "She has not taken the veil any more than I have," Miss Edgeworth assures her correspondents, rather, one would have thought, unnecessarily. It is evident that fully half of her own pleasure in all these fine doings consisted in the enjoyment of her sisters. She chronicles, with all a mother's fulness of detail, the various compliments which were paid to them, relating amongst other matters that their *début* at Lady Granard's was an enormous success, and that their dresses on that occasion "were declared by the best judges to be perfection." For a little over two months the three sisters remained in Paris, seeing every one of note who was either living there or passing through it during the time. Then, after a short visit to their friend Madame Gautier at Passy, they started for Switzerland, to pay their long promised

visit to M. and Madame Moilliet, reaching Geneva in the beginning of August.

The house in which they there found themselves lodged had belonged to the Empress Josephine, a fact which gave it a certain distinction. That it also commanded excellent views of the lake and the mountains was another commendable point, but scarcely perhaps one of equal importance. As Miss Edgeworth herself put it in one of her letters, "Fanny and I both prefer society — good society — to fine landscapes, or even to volcanoes." Upon what occasion she had been urged to make the acquaintance of volcanoes does not appear from the record of her travels, although of other and more desirable acquaintances there was undoubtedly no lack. Geneva is not somehow instinctively associated in the mind with brilliancy, yet there seems to have been enough of that quality at this period in and about the town, to have supplied half a dozen other towns of its size. Mr. and Mrs. Marcet; Arago; De Candolle the botanist; Von Stein; Sismondi — all are considerable names, and the owners of all five were at that moment to be found in or near Geneva. Other people of scarcely less note swelled the circle, and with all these the sociable Irish sisters seem to have been upon more or less intimate terms.

After leaving Geneva they paid a visit of some length to Madame de Staël's son and daughter-in-law at Coppet — Madame de Staël herself had died a few years previously, so that the two writers unfortunately never met. Naturally the visitors were deeply interested in all they saw and heard here, and not least in the little Rocca boy, Madame de Staël's seldom mentioned youngest son. He is described by Miss Edgeworth — a

judge of children — as "an odd, cold, prudent, old-man-sort of a child," and further on as "not in the least like Madame de Staël, and as unlike as possible to a son you would have expected from such parents." From Coppet they returned to Geneva, and in October paid a visit to Lyons, a town which, from its associations with her father, Miss Edgeworth had particularly wished to see. By the end of October the three sisters were back again in Paris, where they settled themselves into an *appartement garni*, with a *valet de place*, a *femme de charge*, and all else becoming. Here they remained for another three months, and again found themselves meeting and being received by every one who was worth the knowing. The account given by Miss Edgeworth of Madame de la Rochejaquelein — "with a broad, round, fair face — her hair cut short and perfectly grey, her form all squashed on a sofa," has been often quoted. "*Je sais que je détruis toute illusion*," the poor ci-devant Vendean heroine was in the habit of saying of herself. By December 1820 Maria and her two sisters were back again in London, and after a brief stay there, another visit to Bowood, and, a few visits to Badminton, Easton, and other houses of distinction, they reached home in February 1821.

By this time all the earlier fuss and excitement over the appearance of Mr. Edgeworth's *Memoir* had naturally subsided. Fortunately for herself Miss Edgeworth possessed, moreover, the invaluable quality of never fretting over the unalterable. All the doubts and anxieties which had so beset her while the appearance of the book was still in abeyance, were now at rest. — "You would scarcely believe the calm, and

the sort of satisfied resignation I feel as to my father's life," she wrote to her stepmother a few months before her return home. To Mrs. Ruxton, who had evidently been seriously upset over the accusations of impiety — "Never lose another night's rest, or another moment's thought," she wrote, "over the *Quarterly Review* — I have not read it, and never intend to read it." She had done her best; she believed that her father, could he be consulted on the matter, would be satisfied; and that was enough. It was characteristic of her attitude towards that most masterful of parents, that the first task she set herself upon her return home was to finish the sequel of *Harry and Lucy*, a work which had been begun by him, but had been subsequently turned over to his daughter. On this account it was a sacred legacy. She could do nothing to please herself, she told those about her, till that was done.

The winter of 1821–22 found her and her two sisters again in London, seeing old friends, or making the acquaintance of others destined in the course of time to become so. She described to her correspondents at considerable length the scenes which she saw at Newgate, under Mrs. Fry's guidance. She took her sisters to Almack's, where, while they danced, she talked, amongst other people, to Lord Londonderry, who assured her that he had long desired the privilege of meeting her; an awed circle meanwhile standing round the minister and the lady whom he selected to honour. She became intimate with Mrs. Somerville, the astronomer, of whom she prettily said that "while her head is amongst the stars, her two feet are firm upon the earth." She saw Mrs. Siddons twice, once in "Lady Macbeth"; she paid a variety of pleasant visits;

finally returned home again in June 1822; from which date there appear to be no further visits nor any other special events to chronicle, till we come to the visit that was the most important of her life, the one which laid the foundations of the most memorable by far of her many friendships.

CHAPTER XII

FRIENDSHIP WITH SCOTT

It was in May 1823 that Miss Edgeworth again set forth from Edgeworthstown, taking with her this time Harriet, and the third of her young half-sisters, Sophy. Scotland, not the Continent, was on this occasion the bourne of their pilgrimage, and above and beyond everything else in Scotland, Abbotsford and its owner. Nor had their feet been many days upon Scottish soil before that encounter took place. It was characteristic of both authors — highly creditable, I add, to the Irish one — that nothing, not that most primitive of feminine necessities, the necessity of appearing respectably clad before a distinguished circle of strangers, was able to delay the meeting even for a few hours. Miss Edgeworth tells her correspondents how it all happened. She and her sisters had barely reached their Edinburgh lodgings, unpacked, or begun to unpack, before she received a note from Sir Walter himself. An arrangement had previously been made by which they were to dine first with their old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Alison, and the note was simply to confirm that arrangement, and further, to invite them to dine with the Scotts upon the Sunday following at five, upon which occasion, or upon the next day, Monday, "one or two of the Northern lights" had

been especially invited, Sir Walter tells her, to meet them. The letter ended — "Respectfully yours," but the real gist of it lay in the postscript, which went on to relate that the Laird of Staffa, and certain of his clansmen, were coming to sing Highland boat-songs that very evening: — "and if you will come, as the Irish should to the Scotch, without any ceremony, you will hear what is perhaps more curious than mellifluous. The man returns to the Isles tomorrow. There are no strangers with us; no party; none but our own family, and two old friends."

"Ten o'clock struck," writes Miss Edgeworth, "as I read this note. We were tired; we were not fit to be seen, but . . . I sent for a hackney coach, and just as we were, without dressing, we went. As the coach stopped, we saw the hall lighted, and the moment the door opened, heard the joyous sounds of loud singing. Three servants — 'The Miss Edgeworths!' sounded from hall to landing-place; and as I paused for a moment in the ante-room, I heard the first sound of Walter Scott's voice — 'The Miss Edgeworths? — *come!*'"

In this manner the eventful meeting took place, and the friendship between these two — great man and little lady — seems to have grown to its full height literally at their first hand-clasp. It was already, it must be remembered, a pretty old and intimate one, so far as correspondence can be said to create intimacy. Now all unnecessary preliminaries were waived, and the acquaintanceship became friendship almost in a single evening: —

"My first impression was that he (Sir Walter) was neither so large or so heavy as I had been led to expect from descriptions, prints, busts, and pictures. He is more lame, on the other hand, than I expected, but not unwieldy."

The Gaelic singing is next described by Miss Edgeworth at some length, after which followed supper: —

"As I sat beside him, I could not believe that he was a stranger, and I quite forgot that he was a great man."

So ended that momentous first evening, and —

"When we wakened in the morning, the whole scene of the preceding night seemed like a dream! However, at twelve came the real Lady Scott, and we called for Scott at the Parliament House, who came out of the Courts with a joyous face, as if he had nothing on earth to do, or to think of, but to show us Edinburgh."

For the other side of the same story we should have to turn to the pages of Lockhart, or to Scott's own familiar letters. In one of these he describes at some length the effect produced upon Edinburgh the critical by the "lioness," as he calls her, adding on his own account, that he found her "full of fun and spirit; a little slight figure, very active, very good-humoured, and full of enthusiasm." For the benefit of those to whom Miss Edgeworth exists only as the painstaking but prosaic instructress of youth, it may be well to emphasise the fact that Scott's admiration for her was no temporary bit of amiability, born of good-nature, but the genuine conviction of his whole literary life. The continual allusions to her writings which occur in his private letters, no less than the unstinted praise lavished upon them in print, all show upon how high a pedestal he placed her as an author. When, to this impersonal homage, personal acquaintanceship was added, it is clear that his previous disposition in her favour soon ripened into something warmer and even friendlier. He found the woman, in

short — as all her aquaintance did find her — not only as well worth knowing as her books, but very much more so. There was about the little Irish "lioness" a play of humour, a total absence of the attitude of the preacher, or the moralist, which might not have been predicted from the study of her "works" alone. She "sat lightly," as we nowadays put it, to life in general, including — more particularly including — her own pretensions as an authoress.

This lightness of touch is just one of the points in which these two writers, major and minor, show an unmistakable touch of kinship. It has been seen how mockingly Miss Edgeworth repelled the very idea that any of her own efforts could be expected to detain for more than a moment the attention of serious folk. In the case of Sir Walter Scott it is more difficult to realise the same point of view, recalling the well-nigh abject admiration of which he was in his own lifetime the subject. That he did hold it, is none the less fairly certain. Romance — the thing itself, the eternal, the adorable — was from boyhood very bone of his bone, very flesh of his flesh; but romance, in the sense of his own printed books, seems never to have been for Scott the foremost, or even one of the more important elements of existence. Abbotsford and its adornments; his own and his heirs' position as county magnates of the secondary class; his multifarious obligations as a good friend, a good neighbour, a good Tory, and a good Scotsman — these, and a host of similar matters, stood far higher in his estimation than did ever his own books, or his own position as an author.

Meanwhile Sunday came in due course, and with it arrived the three Miss Edgeworths — the younger ones

presumably in muslin frocks and sandals — to dine with Sir Walter and Lady Scott. . . . "I sat beside Scott, and I dare not even attempt to think of any of the anecdotes he told, or the fragments of poetry he repeated, lest I should be tempted to write them down for you, and should never end this letter," Maria writes to her aunt. "*Quentin Durward*," she adds, "was lying on the drawing-room table, and Mrs. Skene took it up and said, 'This is really too barefaced.' A few days before that, Sir Walter, pointing to the hospital built by Heriot, had remarked, with a twinkle in his eye, 'That was built by one Heriot, you know, the jeweller in Charles the Second's time.'" The secret of secrets was thus, we see, ostensibly kept up, though little or no mystery remained around it by this time for anybody.

The next event in the programme seems to have been a visit to Roslin Castle, to which they were escorted by the Romancer in person. "It is about seven miles from Edinburgh, and I wished it had been twice as far." "How Walter Scott can find time to write all he writes," Miss Edgeworth adds, "I cannot conceive. He appears to have nothing to think of but to be amusing." Yet this was the summer of 1823, only two years, therefore, before the great collapse.

Previous to their leaving Edgeworthstown it had been arranged that this visit to Scotland was to include one to the Highlands. Thither, shortly afterwards, the sisters accordingly departed, being joined on the way by their engineer brother, William, for whom — not mountains, lakes, or poets — but the dredging operations upon the Caledonian Canal were the main attraction. They spent a day much to their satisfaction at

Fern Tower, with Sir David and Lady Baird — "a fine old soldier, without an arm, but with a heart and a head. . . . He swallows me, though an authoress, wonderfully well," writes Miss Edgeworth. She caught a bad cold on the way to Inverness, which turned to erysipelas, and alarmed her sisters. They found a good doctor, however, at Forres, and a good inn, and after a while she got better, and they were able to start again. Like scores of faithful travellers who have followed in their footsteps, they walked the heather with *Marmion*, *Waverley*, or *Rob Roy*, as the case might be, in their hands. By the month of August they were back again in Edinburgh, within easy reach of the progenitor of these heroes, and now came the crowning joy of Miss Edgeworth's trip — perhaps of her life — a fortnight at Abbotsford.

The weather had been very wet during their trip to the Highlands, but it mended magically as they reached their destination, and the whole party rejoiced at the summer having at last appeared. "My daughter Sophy" — this is an extract from the Edgeworth family record — "mentioned the Irish tune, 'You've brought the Summer with you,' and repeated the first line of Moore's words adapted to it. 'How pretty!' said Sir Walter. 'Moore's the man for songs; Campbell can write an ode, and I can make a ballad, but Moore beats us all at a song.'"

In this fashion the visit began, and for an enchanted fortnight so it continued. Even Lockhart — by no means the man for violent or heady enthusiasms — grows quite lyrical when he comes to describe that halcyon fortnight. "August 1823," he writes, "was one of the happiest in Scott's life. Never did I see

a brighter day at Abbotsford than that on which Miss Edgeworth arrived there. Never can I forget her look and accent when she was received by him at his archway, and exclaimed: 'Everything about you is exactly what one ought to have had wit enough to dream!' . . . Day after day, as long as she could remain, her host had always some new plan of gaiety. One day there was fishing on the Cauldshields Loch, and a dinner on the heathy bank. Another, the whole party feasted by Thomas the Rhymer's waterfall in the glen; and the stone on which 'Maria' sat that day was ever afterwards called 'Edgeworth's Stone.' . . . Thus a fortnight was passed — and then the vision closed. Miss Edgeworth never saw Abbotsford again."

If the cold and critical Lockhart could break forth into such a strain as this, little wonder if the pens of more impressionable people fairly brimmed over and sputtered with delight and excitement! The letters which record this visit from the Edgeworth side have, however, all been published, whereas there are several dealing with Sir Walter's visit to Edgeworthstown which have not yet seen the light. It seems better, therefore, to pass on, and resist the temptation to linger any longer over these Scottish experiences. It was upon the twelfth of August that the three sisters left Abbotsford, and, after a short visit to some friends near Glasgow, they returned to Ireland.

A letter from Sir Walter Scott, bearing the date of the 22nd of September, seems to show that Miss Edgeworth was by that time at Edgeworthstown. "I conclude," he writes, "that you are now settled quietly at home, and looking back on recollections of mountains

and valleys, of pipes and clans and cousins, masons and carpenters, and puppy-dogs, and all the confusion of Abbotsford, as one does on the recollections of a dream. We shall not easily forget the vision of having seen you, . . . and your kind indulgence for all our humours, sober and fantastic, rough or smooth."

Exactly two years later, in the same month of August, only in the year 1825, followed the return visit. Captain Scott, Sir Walter's eldest son, was settled for the moment with his well-dowered bride in Dublin, where the regiment to which he belonged was then quartered. It was the wish to see this young couple which took Sir Walter in the first instance to Ireland, but that the visit to Edgeworthstown had from the beginning filled a considerable place in his plans is clear. The following letters, descriptive of that visit, are not by Maria Edgeworth, but by one of her younger sisters. They are, however, so vivid, and so full of fresh detail, as to seem well worth rescuing from oblivion. The "Mr. Crampton" mentioned, it may be well to explain, was the well-known Dublin physician, still better known afterwards as Sir Philip Crampton. He is described by Lockhart as having upon this occasion "equally gratified both the novelists by breaking the toils of his great practice in order to witness their meeting upon his native shore."

"EDGEWORTHSTOWN, *Saturday, July* 30, 1825.

"We were all happily dressed and in the library before half-past six, when a German barouche drove to the door containing Sir Walter, Miss Scott, and Mr. Crampton, apologising for the remainder of the party,

who would come in the evening, Captain Scott being detained by some military duty. The first sight was all dust, their coats, hair, and eyebrows all powdered over, Miss Scott's black hair quite white. The first surprise I felt about Sir Walter was — 'how very lame he is.' . . .

"There was a little conversation about County of Wicklow beauties, with which they were very much pleased, before dinner, and at dinner a good deal of talk of various kinds. Mr. Jephson, Mr. Crampton, Sir Walter, and Maria were the chief speakers, but I confess I did not hear much, for Sir Walter speaks low, and till one becomes used to his tone it is difficult to understand him; besides, my attention was somewhat divided by Miss Scott, who sat at our end of the table, and who was very conversible. She is a fine-looking, black-eyed, bright, happy-looking girl. Just as the ladies left the dining-room, the school band was heard at a distance, and as it approached playing a gay tune, it excited Miss Scott's and Crampton's spirits of dancing so much that they flew out on the grass-plot, and made Harriet join them in a reel. The boys at a distance were playing leap-frog; Sir Walter stood benevolently looking on. As the light was by this time more from the clear moon than from any remains of daylight, it did look very picturesque and gay, and it was late before we could come in from the dewy air. We then all assembled in the library. Sir Walter sat down near Aunt Mary, so that she could hear his voice, and he and Mr. Jephson and Maria talked of Dr. Johnson and Boswell, of whom Sir Walter told some good stories; and then somehow or other there was a sudden turn to the subject of mad dogs and hydrophobia;

some doubts of the reality of the disease being uttered by Sir Walter, Mr. Crampton told some very interesting facts of cases where hydrophobia had been brought on when the imagination could have had no influence, and mentioned a fact which I do not remember ever hearing before, that the disease breaks out spontaneously in man, and that it is in reality a contagious disease to which wolves, foxes, cats, dogs, and men are subject. While this conversation was still going on, the remainder of the party, Captain and Mrs. Scott and Mr. Lockhart arrived, three very pretty (!) people. Mrs. Scott pretty, but unfashioned, and very silent. Captain Scott very handsome and tall, and much less shy than I expected. He seems to have a great deal of humour in a quiet way of his own. Mr. Lockhart handsome and clever-looking, but much less tremendous than I expected. They stood and talked and eat a little supper, and by degrees all were housed in bed.

"This morning has been chiefly spent in sitting keeping ourselves as cool as possible, with the thermometer nearly 80 in the library, where Mr. Crampton, Mr. Jephson, and Sir Walter have been telling anecdotes *à l'envie, l'un de l'autre*. It would be vain, even if I could do them justice in the telling, to attempt to repeat them, as the tone of voice, manner, and countenance would be still wanting. Sir Walter gave us a very pleasing account of Marshal Macdonald, not at all like a soldier in looks, slight and delicate in appearance, but his conduct seems to have been much more steady than any of the other generals. When Napoleon went to Elba, at the restoration of the Bourbons he swore allegiance to Lewis; when Buonaparte

reappeared, and all hurried to return to him, Macdonald was steady to the King and followed him, — upon hearing which Buonaparte exclaimed, 'That's like Macdonald, always the last to forsake his friends.' Ney accused Macdonald of ingratitude for not abiding by Buonaparte, to which he answered, 'Ney, it is not for you to teach me what is honour or duty.'"

This fragment of conversation strikes one as having undergone a certain amount of blunting in the course of reporting. The following description of Scott's personal appearance is, on the other hand, excellent, the writer having been herself a competent artist. The original manuscript letter is decorated with various little pencil sketches of the illustrious guest, full of character, and unmistakable as likenesses: —

"The first print I ever saw of Sir Walter — the one with his dog — is like him, I think, but the others represent him as much younger than he is now, and without the sort of roughness mixed with polish, which appears to me to be one of the great characteristics of his appearance. He is now very grey, and at first looked to me uncommonly grave, but the humour in his eyebrow soon showed itself, and when he listens to what amuses him, or when he is telling one of his favourite anecdotes, his countenance is quite delightful, and — except when standing or walking, when his lameness appears so much more than I had been prepared for — his attitudes are all picturesque from their peculiar ease. I wished very much to take a sketch of him, but, when I could have done so without his suspecting me, his daughter was too near for me to venture."

Venture, however, the writer did, as I can personally vouch, although the sketches made were only of the thumb-nail order. Upon the all-engrossing subject of the authorship of the novels, some mystification seems to have been still kept up, although between Miss Edgeworth and Sir Walter it had evidently long been tacitly dropped. Her sister Honora's report of the matter runs as follows: — "Once in speaking of a masquerade, Sir Walter said that one man was dressed as Ivanhoe. This was the only direct mention I heard him make of his works, but those who know him better say that he is continually making allusions to them, and his conversation is so very like them, that if one had doubts before, one could not after listening to him. I was much amused with a little dialogue which passed between Mr. Jephson, Maria, and Sir Walter, when each came so near without actually touching the tender point. It began very far off about Wilkes and his character, and Burke, several anecdotes of whom were told by Mr. Jephson; from thence the transition was easy to *Junius's letters*, which Mr. Jephson said he had read over lately, and was surprised to find how inferior they now appeared to him from what he had thought them formerly. Then, most naturally, the well-kept secret of their author was talked of. The idea of Sir Philip Francis being the author, Sir Walter said, was so well supported by Mr. Jeffrey in one of the *Edinburgh Reviews*, that he was convinced by the facts there stated, till, some time afterwards, in talking of it to Jeffrey, he said, 'I was perfectly convinced of his being the man *when* I wrote that review, but since, facts have come out which make one doubt.' Mr. Jephson said that he had heard no one ventured to

ask the straightforward question; 'indeed,' added he, 'there are some questions which no man has any right to ask, and the refusal to answer which truly, cannot be imputed to any one as a crime.' 'Yes,' said Maria, 'there are many cases in which it is scarcely possible to answer truly — if you are trusted by another, for instance.' 'To be sure,' said Sir Walter Scott; 'suppose a robber took your money from your pocket, and then asked if you had any more about you, and that you had £100 in your bosom, are you bound to tell him so? No; every man has a right to judge what questions he should or should not answer.'"

"*Sunday, July* 31, 1825.

"It takes a long time to tell badly on paper what is told in a minute so well by the 'taleteller,' as Sir Walter calls himself. Dinner went off well, at least *I* think so, for the fates were so kind as to place me beside Sir Walter, who did not seem to consider me beneath his notice, but bestowed upon me a great deal of his conversation. It happened to turn a good deal upon trials and executions. He says he never saw any one on trial conduct himself with such perfect composure as Thistlewood; he watched him the whole time, and never saw his eye quail for a moment. After dinner my mother accomplished what she had been waiting for all the evening. She took Sir Walter to Lucy[1] for about a quarter of an hour, and he was very kind, and spoke just enough to show his manner, and to delight her more with him than even our descriptions could have done. He made his adieux at night to all of us who were not to see him next morning, and we all

[1] The invalid sister.

retired very late. They were to set out at seven, but it was eight before they were off, and Maria and Harriet actually went with them, a fact which I did not believe would take place till I saw them in the carriages. Captain and Mrs. Scott had a chaise; Maria started with Mrs. Scott, Harriet with Sir Walter and Miss Scott, in his German barouche. To complete their good fortune the weather changed from the great heat and bright sun, to a cooler atmosphere and greyer sky, softened by a few showers the night before, and has not yet broken up with torrents of rain, as I feared it would, whenever a change took place. If the farmers will forgive me for wishing it, I must wish that the rain may still remain suspended over our heads for one week till they have seen Killarney, but to-day is very threatening, and I cannot but fear."

For what happened after they left Edgeworthstown, we have again to fall back upon Lockhart. In his *Life of Scott* the visit to Edgeworthstown will be found fully reported from his own point of view; he next goes on: — "Miss Edgeworth, her sister Harriet, and her brother William, were easily persuaded to join our party for the rest of our Irish travels. We had lingered a week at Edgeworthstown, and were now anxious to make the best of our way towards the Lakes of Killarney; but posting was not to be very rapidly accomplished in those regions by so large a company as had now collected, and we were more agreeably delayed by the hospitalities of Miss Edgeworth's old friends, and several of Sir Walter's new ones."

Hospitality may have its drawbacks, and Lockhart

was not the man to minimise them! "Irish country houses," he remarks, "appear to have been constructed upon the principle of the Peri Banou's tent. They seemed all to have room not only for the lion and lioness, and their respective tails, but for all in the neighbourhood who could be held worthy to inspect them at feeding-time." As the party advanced south the poverty of the country began to grow more and more apparent, until even Sir Walter found himself constrained to admit that the state of affairs was not quite so roseate as it had seemed when, writing from Edgeworthstown a week earlier, he had declared that, "in sober sadness, to talk of the misery of Ireland is to speak of the illness of a *malade imaginaire. Well* she is not, but she is rapidly becoming so." From Lockhart's account it is evident that even this most rooted of optimists was forced by degrees to accept the evidence of his own senses. "As we moved deeper into the country," his son-in-law writes, "there was a melancholy in his countenance, and, despite himself, in the tone of his voice, which I for one could not mistake." Fortunately, as rarely fails to be the case in Ireland, there was no lack of humorous incidents to break in upon and qualify this gloom. At one house, where they had been advised to seek for hospitality, they found upon their arrival that the master of it had died only the day before. To the inn, to which they had thereupon hastily retired, they were followed by a note from the sorrowing widow, confirming the sad intelligence, and adding that—"Mrs. —— the more regrets it, since it will prevent her from having the honour to see Sir Walter Scott and Miss Edgeworth!"

A few days earlier, at Limerick, a poetical encounter took place which is thus described by Lockhart: —

"Amidst the ringing of all the bells, in honour of our advent, there was ushered in a brother-poet, who must needs pay his personal respects to the author of *Marmion*. He was a scarecrow figure — attired much in the fashion of the *strugglers* — by name O'Kelly; and he had produced on the spur of the occasion this modest parody of Dryden's famous epigram: —

> 'Three poets of three different nations born,
> The United Kingdom in this age adorn;
> Byron of England, Scott of Scotia's blood,
> And Erin's pride — O'Kelly, great and good.'

"Sir Walter's five shillings were at once forthcoming; and the bard, in order that Miss Edgeworth might display equal generosity, pointed out, in a little volume of his works (for which, moreover, we had all to subscribe) this pregnant couplet: —

> 'Scott, Morgan, Edgeworth, Byron, prop of Greece,
> Are characters whose fame not soon will cease.'"

To incidents of the road like these Sir Walter and Miss Edgeworth were always ready to do full justice! If Lockhart liked to play the cynic, and to wish himself elsewhere, that was not at all the point of view of the "lion" or the "lioness." At the inn at which they stayed in Killarney — in those days a very modest hostelry — Miss Edgeworth found such a number of matters to admire, that Sir Walter himself began to mock at her for her enthusiasm. Of a certain green baize door which had awakened her admiration — "Miss Edgeworth," he is reported to have said, "you are so mightily pleased with that door that I think you will carry it away with you to Edgeworthstown" — mild

little jests, hardly worth recording, yet which appeal to us, somehow, under the circumstances, as wiser and wittier sayings might hardly do. The chief drawback to their enjoyment was that they were forced to race through all the sights at headlong speed, for Sir Walter had engaged to meet Canning at Windermere, and Captain Scott's leave of absence was running to an end. At Killarney they did happily find time to row round the lakes, as we know from the fact that the boatman who rowed them on that occasion told Lord Macaulay, twenty years later, that his having done so had actually made up to him for "missing a hanging," which took place upon the same day. At Cork, to which they drove across the hills, a reception awaited Sir Walter which rivalled in uproarious acclamation the one which had greeted his arrival in Ireland. Finally the whole party returned in hot haste to Dublin, where a farewell dinner took place at Captain and Mrs. Scott's house, one at which no less than six Edgeworths — four sisters and two brothers — were present.

It chanced to be Sir Walter Scott's birthday — his last happy one, we mentally add — and after dinner all present drank his health enthusiastically, though "with more feeling than gaiety," as the Edgeworth family papers appropriately record. Then followed the farewells — deeply regretful ones, upon one side, at any rate. The Edgeworths returned to Edgeworthstown; Sir Walter sailed for Holyhead, hastening on from there to Windermere, where Canning, Wordsworth, and himself all met at the house of a Mr. Bolton. Thence home to Abbotsford, where Lockhart informs us that "without an hour's delay Sir Walter returned to his

usual habits of life." So matters went on, apparently prosperously, for another three or four months, when two little scenes took place, which may also be found recorded in the pages of Lockhart. The first of these was when he rode over himself one day to Abbotsford, bringing with him the news that Constable's London banker had "thrown up his books." The next was twelve hours later, when, in the cold grey of the following morning, looking out of his bedroom window, he saw "the Sheriff," as he called his father-in-law, in the act of dismounting at his door, and, hurrying downstairs, ascertained that he had in the interval taken a night journey to Polton, in order personally to see and to confer with Constable. It was the beginning of the end. Although at the time Scott made light of the affair, and although his own diary — begun about the same date — is almost unaccountably reticent on this subject, the sense of impending doom — of gallant, ceaseless, hopeless struggle — never again lifts till the end is reached. Looked back at across those concluding years, these sunshiny days in Ireland, this visit to Edgeworthstown, these various light-hearted jests and jaunts, stand out with a vividness, a sense of enjoyment and serenity, which they might not otherwise claim.

CHAPTER XIII

LATER LIFE

This intercourse with Scott, these travellings together, and this final parting in Dublin, may certainly be called the highest lights, emotionally speaking, of Miss Edgeworth's life. To delve into the more intimate recesses of one's subject is frequently held to be a prerogative of biographers. While a little doubtful as to there having been any particular recesses in this case to delve into, I need not hesitate to express my conviction that Scott — the man, no less than the author — stood for a good deal more in Miss Edgeworth's eyes than did ever that very shadowy personage, M. Edelcrantz. Now he was gone, never, so Fate had decreed, to be seen by her again. The two events, with all their delights prospective and retrospective — the visit to Abbotsford, the return visit to Edgeworthstown — both had become things of the past, and life in County Longford had for the future to resume its accustomed placid course.

It was a placidity not undiversified, fortunately, with pleasurable incidents. Miss Edgeworth had still over twenty years to live, and another successful book to write, before the inevitable end came. There is a characteristic little entry in a letter to her stepmother written in the year 1834, which throws a good deal

of light both upon her position in her own family, and also upon her outlook on life in general: —

"This morning was one of the wettest and most dismal that your Italian son Francis ever paled at. Nevertheless with us all was bright, radiantly bright. The sunshine came out of the post-box, and spread full upon Honora and me at our coffee, as we sat *tête-à-tête* in her room, between seven and eight. Your delightful accounts of Fanny and Lucy" (the two invalids of the moment) "are more inspiriting than all the blue skies that ever I saw. Not that I mean to affront blue skies, which I like very much in their proper places, poetry inclusive, but they never affect my spirits in the wonderful way they do some folks."

"In their proper places" is nice, and "poetry inclusive" goes well with the rest of the passage!

> "Not much given to insist
> On utilities not in Utility's list."

So Leigh Hunt had written of Miss Edgeworth a good many years before in his *Blue Stocking Revels*. Poetry and blue skies were evidently amongst those non-utilitarian utilities which she was always perfectly prepared as a good philosopher to do without. If it came to a question of choice—"Company, I mean good company," ranked with her, as we have seen, some way first. Of this, the one solid and really indispensable element of life, she seems to have had during those later years enough to furbish forth the lives of half a dozen less fortunately circumstanced authors and authoresses. In a letter of the year 1826 to her aunt Mrs. Ruxton, she writes: —

"Yesterday when I came down to breakfast I found Sir Humphry Davy, with a countenance radiant with pleasure, eager to tell me that Captain Parry is to be sent out upon a

new Polar Expedition. The same day arrived Leslie Foster, on his way to Roscommon, delighted to find Sir Humphry here; and he made new diversion by the history of the election, of which he was full. He looks ten years older and balder, and seemed glad to find a resting-place here among friends."

Another letter, written in September 1827 to her cousin, Sophy Ruxton, runs as follows: —

"The day before yesterday we were amusing ourselves by telling who, among literary and scientific people, we should wish to come here next day. Francis said Coleridge; I said *Herschel*. Yesterday morning, as I was returning from my morning walk at half-past eight, I saw a bonnetless maid on the walk, with letter in hand, in search of me. When I opened the letter, I found it was from Mr. Herschel! and that he was waiting for an answer at Mr. Briggs's inn. I have seldom been so agreeably surprised! And now that he has spent twenty-four hours here, and that he is gone, I am confirmed in my opinion; and if the fairy were to ask me the question again, I should more eagerly say—'Mr. Herschel, ma'am, if you please.'"

So the years sped on, pleasant, friendly, if not precisely eventful. Marriages and—as was inevitable in so widely extended a circle—deaths were the chief events which are recorded in the course of them. Whether Miss Edgeworth was, or was not, in those days the virtual owner of Edgeworthstown, seems to be doubtful. Mr. Hare asserts that she was, but that view is not borne out by nearer authorities. In any case, hers was undoubtedly the chief guiding hand over its arrangements, and her purse the one that was always open for every emergency. In 1829 a distant relation, "Mrs. Anna Edgeworth, of London," died, as we learn from the family annals, "and bequeathed to

Maria a pair of diamond earrings and pearl bracelets. With the proceeds of these she built a market-house in the village, and a room over it for the Magistrates' Petty Sessions."

Incidents like these show that her benevolence extended to a considerably wider area than even her own widely extended family circle. Her name seems indeed to have been almost as well known in her own part of Ireland for kindliness as for authorship. In the year 1831 she chanced to be on her way back from a visit of some weeks in London, and found on arriving in Dublin that no room was to be had in her usual quarters. It was necessary to go in search of others, and the hotel to which she was directed proved to be, not only very uninviting-looking, but even fuller than the one she had just left. The situation for the moment seemed hopeless, but as usual her name worked miracles. — "While we were parleying with the waiter and chambermaid, a red-eyed, thin-faced man put his head between their shoulders — 'My name's Burke, ma'am, and I've just learned your name's Edgeworth, and you're as welcome as life to the best room in my house for anything *at all!* Only not a room have I vacant till after twelve, then the General will be gone, and you shall have a proper drawing-room, if you'll kindly take up with what you see till after breakfast.'"

To the properly constituted mind there will always be something particularly pleasant about such spontaneous tributes as these, and, however philosophically Miss Edgeworth might take her ordinary triumphs, it is evident, from the fact of her recording it, that an incident like the foregoing gave her quite the right and

human amount of pleasure. Space dwindles, and only a few items, out of the many with which these years were filled, can be given here. In May 1829 her brother William, the engineer, died, as so many of the Sneyd branch of the family had done, of rapid consumption. In the September following Wordsworth visited Edgeworthstown, and is described by Miss Edgeworth as having "a good philosophical bust, and a long, thin, gaunt face, much wrinkled and weather-beaten." In November 1830 she again paid a visit to London, and while absent there her aunt and lifelong correspondent, Mrs. Ruxton, died, a sorrow which for a time seems to have renewed that peculiar sense of desolation which her father's loss had for the first time awakened in her.

Only one more expedition seems to have been made to the Atlantic side of Ireland after the memorable one in the company of Sir Walter Scott and Lockhart. This was in the autumn of 1833, nearly nine years later. A Sir Culling and Lady Smith chanced to be amongst the visitors to Edgeworthstown in the course of that summer — opulent folk apparently, possessors of a "mighty grand" travelling coach, drawn by four horses, and all else to match. At their urgent request Miss Edgeworth was induced to accept a seat in the said travelling coach, and to accompany them in their progress through the west of Ireland, a trip in which it was proposed to include the then almost unattainable region of Connemara.

For strictly personal reasons the most interesting part of that expedition to her present biographer lies in the fact of Miss Edgeworth having on this occasion

made acquaintance with the Martins of Ballinahinch, especially with the remarkable daughter of that house, Mary Martin. In those days the extreme west of Ireland was, to the inhabitants of its more conventional and anglicised eastern portions, almost as foreign, it must be remembered, as if the same set of seas had not enclosed both. So far from there being any railroad across its intricacies, there were not at the time even any driving ones, although the enterprising Nimmo — rival and precursor of Macadam — was just then in the very act of constructing them. Unluckily for our travellers, they were not yet in a sufficiently advanced state to be driven over. "Nimmo's new road, looking like a gravel path," Miss Edgeworth wrote to her brother, "was running parallel to our road of danger, yet, for want of being finished, useless, and *most* tantalising."

Tantalising, truly, considering that this was the sort of thing that it was destined to supersede: —

"Through eighteen sloughs we went, or were got, at the imminent peril of our lives. Why the carriage was not broken to pieces I cannot tell, but an excellent strong carriage it was, thank Heaven and the builder, whoever he was." . . . "It grew dark, and Sir Culling, very brave, was walking beside the carriage, so when we came to the next bad step, he sank above his knees. How they dragged him out I could not see, and there were we in the carriage stuck fast in a slough, which, we were told, was the last but one before we reached Ballinahinch Castle. Suddenly my eyes were blessed with a twinkling light in the distance — a boy with a lantern. And when, breathless, he panted up to the side of the carriage, and thrust up lantern and note (we still in the slough), how glad I was to see him and it! and to hear him say, 'Then Mr. Martin 's very unaasy about yees — so he is.'"

The letter describing all this is to be found in the *Life and Letters*, and was written nearly a year later to her brother Pakenham, who was then in India. From it we ascertain that the visit to the Martins was originally an impromptu, being due entirely to her own terrors over the road. The inn at Clifden, the nearest town, had been their original destination, but, after the coach had stuck fast for the twentieth time, she and Lady Smith persuaded Sir Culling to let her send her card with an appeal for hospitality to Mr. Martin. Needless to say, it was at once responded to. They reached the Castle of Ballinahinch alive, only to find its chimneys on fire! That, however, appeared to be a matter of not the slightest consequence, in fact a mere precursor to the dinner, which is described by Miss Edgeworth as follows: — "Such a dinner! London *bons vivants* might have blessed themselves! Venison such as Sir Culling declared could not be found in England, except from one or two immense parks; salmon, lobsters, oysters, game; all well cooked and well served, and well placed upon the table. Nothing loaded; all in good taste; wines, such as I was not worthy of, but Sir Culling knew how to praise them; champagne, and all manner of French wines."

More interesting than even Mr. Martin's really remarkable impromptu dinner, was, in Miss Edgeworth's eyes, Mr. Martin's only daughter: — "Miss Martin sat opposite to me, and, with the light of the branch candles full upon her, I saw that she was very young, about seventeen, very fair, with hair which might be called red by rivals, and auburn by friends, her eyes blue grey, prominent, and like some picture I have seen by Leonardo da Vinci."

As it turned out, Miss Edgeworth was destined to have more extended opportunities for getting acquainted with this Leonardo da Vinci-like daughter of the West than had at first seemed probable. Whether owing to the shocks of her journey, or to some other cause, upon the following day Lady Smith fell seriously ill. It was found to be impossible to move her, and for the next three weeks, the whole party were forced to remain upon the hospitable hands of the Martins. Although nothing could have exceeded their kindness, the sense of isolation, as well as the difficulties about receiving any of their letters, proved to be no small trial to the guests. Three times a week a "gossoon" ran with the post to Oughterard, thirty-six miles away, where the nearest coach passed. "One runs for a day and a night, and then sleeps for a day and a night, while another takes his turn," Miss Edgeworth explained to her brother. Of the manner of life prevailing in the region, and of the patriarchal rule of Mr. Martin himself, she has also much to tell, but above and beyond everything else, her interest is evidently centred in the heiress of all this semi-savage magnificence. On one occasion Miss Martin took Sir Culling Smith and herself to visit the Connemara marble quarries, followed by her usual train of followers. Wishing for an answer from one of the latter, Sir Culling asked her to pass on her inquiry in her own fashion. — "When the question had been put and answered, Sir Culling objected, 'But, Miss Martin, you did not put the question exactly as I asked you to state it.' 'No,' said she, with colour raised and head thrown back, 'no, because I knew how to put it so that *my* people can understand it. *Je sais mon métier de reine.*'"

It was the old world and the new one brought face to face with a vengeance! the contrast rendered the more piquant from the fact of the new one being represented by the worthy middle-aged baronet, the old by the girl of seventeen. Miss Edgeworth has her own shrewd comments to make upon it all, and describes with much amusement — "the astonishment of Sir Culling at Miss Martin's want of sympathy with his own really liberal and philanthropic views for Ireland, while she is full of her 'tail'; of her father's fifty-miles-long avenue; also of Æschylus and Euripides, in which she is admirably well read. Do think of a girl of seventeen, in the wilds of Connemara, intimately acquainted with all the beauties of Æschylus and Euripides, and having them as part of her daily thoughts!"

Noteworthy enough, yet to the student of Irish social life there are facts to be remembered about Mary Martin which are even more noteworthy than her knowledge of Æschylus. If she strutted her brief hour with somewhat too queen-like a gait, 'twere harsh to grudge it, remembering what was to be the sequel of it all. — "Don't you think your friend Sir Walter Scott would have liked our people and country?" the poor Connemara "Princess" one day asked Miss Edgeworth rather wistfully. It was the last chance for Sir Walter, or any other magician, to wave the wand of description over a state of affairs which was even at that moment hurrying to its end. With her keen eye for a situation, Miss Edgeworth in the same letter points out that the state of affairs then prevailing at Ballinahinch was — "not so much a feudal state, as the *tail* of a feudal state. Dick Martin — father of the

present man — was not only lord of all he surveyed, but lord of all the lives of the people. Now the laws of the land have come in, and rival proprietors have sprung up."

Despite their wide diversity of views, something like a genuine friendship seems to have arisen between the distinguished guest and her entertainers, a sentiment which was evidently especially warm upon Miss Edgeworth's side towards the youngest of those entertainers — "Mary." After nearly four weeks' illness, Lady Smith, however, began to mend. The coach and horses were ordered out of Mr. Martin's stables, where they had all this time been reposing, and a guide was secured to see the party safe out of Connemara, across the endless sloughs. They departed, and these two women — interesting if only from sheer force of contrast — never, so far as I am aware, met again. Eleven years afterwards came the great Famine, and a little later, Mary Martin — having in the interval lost parents, castle, retainers, property, everything — too proud to ask for a help which would have been right joyfully given — left Ireland for ever on board of an emigrant ship, having previously married a cousin of her own, almost poorer than herself. The emigrant ship was — what emigrant ships were in those ghastly years, — and the experience was one from which she never recovered. Although friendly hands were stretched out to her on the further shore, it was too late. She died within a brief period of her arrival in America, and with her, it is hardly an exaggeration to say, an entire type — a type of which, to those who had known her, she remained always the most attractive embodiment — perished also.

This, it is as well, however, to remember, is a biography, not of Mary Martin, but of Maria Edgeworth! One of the latest in date of the same batch of unprinted letters from which I have already so largely drawn, was written in the year 1836, and contains the following characteristic description of a scene witnessed by Miss Edgeworth upon the return of Lord and Lady Dillon to their estates in Roscommon. It is addressed to her brother Sneyd: —

"Last night between nine and ten o'clock we suddenly heard a burst of noise, of uproar indescribable, at the hall door, yells, screams, huzzas — and such a blaze of light! When we ran out of the dining-room into the hall, we might have thought that the house was on fire. But it was only rejoicings — from a crowd of hundreds of ragged subjects, bearing in their hands, and flourishing high in air, great poles, to which huge blazing wisps of straw were fastened, which streamed to the sparkling night. A strong light was cast on the wild figures, and on the strange, gaunt, savage, comic, expecting, intelligent, grinning, pathetic faces, crowded below, up to the very high hall door steps, upon which Lord and Lady Dillon stood; the sea of heads, as far as eye could reach, ending in darkness visible. It was one of the most striking sights I ever saw — and would have been the finest study for a painter — I wished for Wilkie — but more for Mulready, who has some Irish genius. There is in this County of Roscommon a red dye and a deep blue, such as the Italian painters love, which added much to the picturesque effect of these barbaric rejoicings. Some groups of women and children, young and old, sat on

the lowest step, or leaned against the piers, and there was one prominent face of intense curiosity, that of a bare-necked, red-haired man, half rogue, three-quarters savage, stretching neck in front to listen to the lady, which can never leave my eyes.

"The object of the whole (under these rejoicings) was to obtain leave to hold a market, I believe, at Loughglynn. Petition referred by my lord to Mr. Strickland, the agent, and cause adjourned till his return. So with a whoop, and a screech, and a brandish of yet unextinguished torches, they beat them against the ground and disappeared."

Of other unpublished letters, not less good, there are still a considerable number. Only room, however, can be found in these pages for one more, which, if from its touches of humour alone, is irresistible. It begins with an account of all that Miss Edgeworth saw and did at Armagh, while upon a visit there to her lively scientific friend, Dr. Robinson of the Observatory, and his wife. Then follows her start home, all alone at half-past five upon a pouring wet morning: —

"I was to have left the Observatory on Saturday, but when all packed, and chaise at the door at eight o'clock, it rained and blew such a storm that I really could not go. Stayed till Monday; gave up the visit to Red House; instead of going in postchaise alone to Ardee, found that I could go in a coach which had just begun to run (to oblige me) by Slane to Dublin; so got up at five o'clock on Monday morning — dark! raining and blowing desperately! The jaunting car having been ordered instead of their chaise I was a little dismayed, but Dr. Robinson was so good as to go

with me, though he had been talking till one o'clock the night before, and had been up long afterwards finishing his observations. [He and Brougham are both of them evidently supernatural beings, and can do without sleep!] Well, in the almost quite dark morning, quarter before six o'clock, he packed me and all my horribly troublesome number of boxes and bags upon the car, and seating himself beside me held a huge umbrella over me — how he held it, Heaven knows, against the wind, and up hill and down hill in that vile hilly town of Armagh (next to Lausanne the most hated by horses). And just as we reached a dark blot in the street which proved to be the coach, 'Stop! Stop for a lady!' — and my boxes were hoisted up, and Dr. Robinson lifted me as you would a doll, from the jaunting car to the coach, and put me safely in without my foot touching wet ground, and without one drop on my bonnet. From the first moment to the last nothing could be kinder than both Dr. and Mrs. Robinson were to me. I have the image of her standing with her thin dressing-gown and nice night-cap on, candle in hand in the passage, to take the last leave of me at a quarter before six that rainy morning, the hall-door open, and the wind draughting — something like friendship that, is it not, my dear? as Molly Macaulay might say. But I shall never get to the end of my journey! In the coach, as soon as the grey light of morning made them visible, I saw opposite to me a thin, mild-looking sort of man with a cleric hat on his knees, and a fat 2-volumes-bound-in-one of a jolly mortal, who might have been a Catholic priest, or a prosperous whiskey-selling shopkeeper. The thin man was a priest, a country curate;

and the thick man I know not what, but a *wag* gratis, and many a joke he cut upon the mild priest, who never soured, always smiled benignantly, not Jesuitically. One instance will tell all. I was at work (Honiton border); I threaded a small needle.

"(*Priest.*) 'Well, long as I have lived' (he could not have lived very long), 'I never saw that done, and would not have believed it possible.'

"(*Wag.*) 'No? Why, then, your Church believes more extraordinary things possible.'

"Presently came in a huge, bang-up-coated, self-sufficient bear of an English agent, with a fur cap on his very handsome head, set at the angle of insolence.

"(*Wag.*) 'Sir, you have the advantage of us in having a lady on the same side with you.'

"Down flopped the gentleman without the least pretence of care for the female, and it was well he did not extinguish me. I shrunk, and was saved. Much politics, and three newspapers unfolded, and handed by the bear to all but the female. Almost all his sentences began or ended with 'I have no hesitation in saying' — or 'Decidedly — decidedly.' He was not without sense or even liberality, but he made both almost odious. He talked of hunting men, as if they were animals. I thought he must be either a Revenue officer or an agent, and I afterwards found he is agent to both Lord Bath and Mr. Shirley. He shall be in my books, I promise him, whenever I get to Ireland again. I am much obliged to him, for he has given me many ideas that will work up well."

Unfortunately Miss Edgeworth never did "get to

Ireland again" in this sense of the word. Writing to a brother who seems to have remonstrated with her on the subject, she tells him that Ireland was just then in too uncomfortable a condition — "we are in too perilous a case" — for her to write another Irish story at that time. The excuse may pass, and has been used since then by worse writers, but it will scarcely serve in the case of an author whose best book — and an Irish book to boot — was written amid the terrors and the turmoils of the year ninety-eight! It was in 1830 — when already past sixty years of age — that Miss Edgeworth set to work upon the last, and what, at the time it was written, was possibly the most successful of all her novels — namely, *Helen*. Any reader who will take it down from its shelf, and glance over it, will quickly perceive that it is a novel of a very much more modern type than any other by the same hand. In reading it we are aware that the eighteenth century has at last dropped out of sight, and that we are well out upon the nineteenth, not indeed as yet "Victorian," but in a sort of midway region, on the road to that superior epoch. The old didactic attitude is still visible, but has become decidedly less aggressive. *À propos* of one of the earlier novels, Lord Jeffrey remarked that — "Miss Edgeworth walks by the side of her characters, as Mentor by the side of Telemachus, keeping them out of all manner of pleasant mischief, and wagging from time to time a monitory finger." The criticism is true of *Helen* also, but is less true of it than of most of the older books. In his undeniably brilliant novel *What will he do with it?* the first Lord Lytton is extremely humorous about poor Miss Edgeworth's heroines. Some young woman in that book is declared to be exactly

like one of them — just the same type of "superior girl"; "so rational, so prudent, so well behaved; so free from silly, romantic notions; so replete with solid information." This again may be perfectly true, only where, one asks oneself by way of parenthesis, have Lord Lytton's *own* adorable heroines got to by this time, or how many novel-readers would undertake to remember so much as a single one of their names?

In the month of February 1833 we find Miss Edgeworth writing as follows to her cousin Sophy Ruxton: —

"I fear you will be tired of hearing of *Helen* before you become acquainted with her. Since I wrote to you last, when I left it to your own choice whether to read her before or after you come here, I see much reason, for her sake and my own, to wish that you should put off reading it till *after* you come to us, and till I have finished it. Now I am in full eagerness finishing, and shall be at the end in three weeks, if I do not stop to do a hundred other things. Therefore, my dear Sophy, and my dear Margaret, I beg you to bear with my changeableness, and *let it be* till the story is finished."

Finished it was within a couple of months of the writing of this letter. There was still, however, before Miss Edgeworth the task of finding a publisher, and of making a bargain — not a part of the profession of literature which she at all relished, or had ever before been called upon to undertake. A piece of great good fortune, however, befell her, and she was able to secure no less an aid and go-between than Lockhart. Under his auspices the bargain was quickly made, and seems to have been an excellent one, for she received a larger sum for *Helen* than for any other single book of hers, with the exception of *Patronage*.

This seems to be the place for furnishing the reader

with a list of the prices received by Miss Edgeworth for her various books, one which I have also been most kindly allowed to copy from her own hitherto unprinted MSS.

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		£	s.	d.
	Parent's Assistant	120	0	0
	Practical Education	300	0	0
	Letters for Literary Ladies	40	0	0
	Castle Rackrent	100	0	0
	Moral Tales	200	0	0
	Early Lessons	50	0	0
	Belinda	300	0	0
	Bulls	100	0	0
	Explanation of Poetry	40	0	0
	Letter to Lord Charlemont	3	12	0
	Griselda	100	0	0
	Popular Tales	300	0	0
	Leonora	200	0	0
	Fashionable Tales, 1st part	900	0	0
	Professional Education	300	0	0
	Fashionable Tales, 2nd part	1050	0	0
	Johnson's account paid and presents of books, etc.	78	16	10
1815	Patronage	2100	0	0
—	Early Lessons, continuation	210	0	0
1817	Comic Dramas	300	0	0
—	Harrington and Ormond	1150	0	0
*1819	Memoirs	750	0	0
*1821	Rosamond. Sequel	420	0	0
*1823	Frank. Sequel	400	0	0

*1828	Little Plays . . .	£100	0	0
*1825	Harry and Lucy, continued .	400	0	0
*1834	Helen	1100	0	0
		£11,062	8	10

These figures are accompanied by a note, in Miss Edgeworth's own handwriting, written as late as the year 1842, only seven years, therefore, before her death. It explains that the books which are marked in the MSS. by a star in red ink were the ones written by her after her father's death — the only ones evidently which she regarded as her own exclusive property. For the copyright of these she received three thousand one hundred pounds, with regard to the expenditure of which we obtain the following characteristic explanation: "I spent of this sum in delightful travelling with my sisters to France, Switzerland, Scotland, and England (including nine or ten months' residence in France, and two winters in London), about two thousand pounds. And I had the pleasure of giving to my brothers and sisters and near relatives from copyright of *Helen* about five or six hundred.

M. E., *September* 1842."

To give away was clearly for Miss Edgeworth of the nature of an indulgence, one that it behoved her to keep in some check! Not alone did she delight in exercising it, as in this instance, upon a somewhat large scale, but also upon the minutest one possible. Nor was it only her own kith and kin, but all who came within her ken were apt to find themselves the more or less surprised recipients of gifts. The habit of universal present-giving is one which

it is to be feared children alone properly appreciate, and it was one of the ties which bound Miss Edgeworth so closely to her long list of child-friends. Not, however, the only one. What she herself called the "Rosamund instincts" — a love of the most infantile sort of adventures, and of playing the truant generally — survived in her to an almost incredible age. This is a side of her character which has never, I think, been sufficiently emphasised by her biographers, and was probably the one which — combined with her tiny size — brought her into such instant freemasonry with every child she encountered, even accidentally. An anecdote is told in one of Mrs. Richmond Ritchie's prefaces of a little girl who, at a crowded party, suddenly started out of a remote corner, looked at her hard, and said, "I like *Simple Susan* best," and then rushed away again, overwhelmed by her own audacity. Another tale, reported upon the authority of Lady Monteagle, refers to a dinner-party, at the beginning of which the principal guest (Miss Edgeworth herself) was, to the dismay of her hostess, suddenly found to be missing. After a considerable delay she was tracked to the back-kitchen, to which she had been lured by the children of the house, in order that she might inspect some rabbits which they were rearing in that appropriate home.

From the half-forgotten pages of an old magazine, the following anecdote has recently been disinterred, which bears directly upon this point. The date of the incident is not given, but clearly it must have occurred quite late in Miss Edgeworth's life. Although anonymous, its authenticity stands legibly inscribed, I think, upon its face: —

"A party of happy young people were travelling half a century ago by train together in England. At one end of their carriage were seated two elderly ladies, one of whom they noticed to be exceedingly small. Strangers at the beginning of the journey, the travellers in time began to exchange remarks with one another, and books soon became the subject on which young and old evidently preferred to talk. At last Miss Edgeworth's works were mentioned: they were great favourites with the young people, and they spoke warmly of the delight that *Simple Susan* and *Lazy Lawrence* had been to them in their childish days. Suddenly two of the party looked at each other and smiled, and one of them turning to the little old lady in the corner said: 'We always feel guilty when we hear Miss Edgeworth spoken of, for when we were children we did such a *dreadful* thing; we cannot imagine now how we could have been so bold. We were very fond of drawing pictures of our pet characters, and of course were always trying to illustrate *The Parent's Assistant*, and only think! we actually made up a packet of what we considered our best pictures, with our Christian names written under them, and posted it to Miss Edgeworth! What must she have thought of such children?'"

The answer was not long delayed, and reads for all the world like an answer out of a fairy tale: —

"The little old lady's kindly face lighted up with pleasure. — 'And *I* can tell you that those drawings are still carefully treasured,' she replied, 'for *I* am Maria Edgeworth!'"

In 1835 Mr. and Mrs. George Ticknor visited Edgeworthstown, and the former has left to the world an elaborate record of all that he saw and did there. I cannot say that his letters on the subject appeal to me particularly. He was received by Miss Edgeworth, he tells his correspondent, at the front-door, who explained to him the various people he might expect to meet in the house — no unnecessary precaution for

a stranger entering so large and so complicated a family circle! He goes on to relate that she was then "almost sixty-seven years of age"; that she was "small, short, and spare"; that she possessed "extremely frank and kind manners, looking straight into your face with a pair of mild, deep grey eyes whenever she speaks." These are the more valuable of the points in his description, unless a reader can be excited by hearing that — "We dined punctually at half-past six, and rejoined the ladies in the library at half-past eight"; or that, on going the Sunday following to church, — "Miss Edgeworth carried her favourite prayerbook in a nice case, and knelt and made the responses very devoutly"; or that finally, upon a portion of the correspondence between her and Sir Walter Scott being shown to him, the comment which it suggested to the distinguished visitor's mind was that it — "seemed to have been extremely creditable to both parties."

England, America, and the Continent all sent visitors to Edgeworthstown during the last two or three decades of Miss Edgeworth's life. It had in fact, to a great degree, come to hold in Ireland the position which Abbotsford for many years held in Scotland; as a place of pilgrimage, one which no self-respecting person visiting the country at that date would like to feel that he or she had missed seeing. Of more local visitors there were also many, amongst whom Mr. and Mrs. Hall, the Irish novelists, ought to be mentioned. Like Mr. Ticknor, Mrs. Hall upon her departure wrote, and moreover published, a somewhat uninspiring report of all that she had seen and heard. Not content with describing the illustrious

authoress herself, she equally minutely describes the less distinguished members of the family, also the library, the village, Sir Walter Scott's pen — an unexpectedly commonplace one — with everything else describable, down to the very chairs and tables. This tribute of admiration being duly returned to her entertainers, "all the world," Miss Edgeworth reports, "were greatly pleased," which obviously was all that could have been desired.

A year or so later another guest appeared at Edgeworthstown, whose name awakens to-day much more response, namely, Edward FitzGerald. Finding himself in Ireland, he took advantage of an invitation given, not by Miss Edgeworth, but by one of her brothers. "I came to this house a week ago," he tells his correspondent, "to visit a male friend." (Even for Edward FitzGerald men and women seem to have been still at that date merely males and females!) The "male friend" had considerately left Edgeworthstown for England the very day before his arrival, and the guest found himself in a house filled exclusively with unknown "females." That older and less gregarious Edward FitzGerald, with whom most of us are more or less acquainted, would probably have fled precipitately, but the younger one seems to have been able to endure such an ordeal with a fair share of philosophy. He remained at Edgeworthstown for over a week, and made himself, as he says, "quite at home." — "All these people very pleasant and kind. . . . The house pleasant; a good library." Of the "great Maria," as he calls her, he goes on to tell his correspondent that she was at the moment in which he was writing — "as busy as a bee, making a catalogue

of her books beside me, and chattering away. We are great friends. She is as lively, active, and cheerful as if she were but twenty. Really a very entertaining person. We talk about Walter Scott, whom she adores, and are merry all the day long."

Another year drifts along after this inspiring description was penned, and we begin to find that the shadows, which none can evade, are at last beginning to gather also about the "great Maria." For some time longer they were still, however, only of the comparatively light and passing variety. One of her two especial sisters, Fanny, had married their friend Mr. Lestock Wilson, and was settled at a distance, in London. The other one, Harriet, was nearer, having married an Irish clergyman, Mr. Butler, and a brisk intercourse seems to have been kept up between their parsonage and Edgeworthstown. After saying that no more letters of Miss Edgeworth were to find place in this volume, I find myself irresistibly drawn into adding two more from the same unprinted supply. Both of these are to Mrs. Butler. From the first we obtain an account of a somewhat serious fall from off a ladder, not elsewhere, I think, mentioned. The original letter describing it, which has been recently in my hands, is adorned with a design supposed to represent herself in the very act of falling: —

"EDGEWORTHSTOWN, *March* 14, 1839.

"MY DEAREST HARRIET, — I hope the frontispiece which I have sketched for you will make you laugh, and very glad I am not to make you cry! I assure you I had a narrow escape of being a cripple on your hands, and your dear mother's, for life.

"How I escaped breaking my legs I know not — so entangled were they among the rungs of the broken ladder, as ladder and I came down together — how I cannot conceive! If I had made the least struggle I *must* have broken both legs, but I let the ladder do just as it pleased, and one-half was so good as to fall clean off one foot, without doing a hap'orth of harm to foot or leg. And the other half of the ladder was content with scraping the skin two half-crowns-worth off my shin-bone, but not cutting through to the bone, leaving most considerately a cherry-red film or skinnikin underneath.

"When I felt the ladder giving way in the middle, I could not conceive what upon the face of the earth was going to happen, and with all speed instinctively I put down one leg to the next rung behind me, but, the ladder having parted in the middle at its hinges, my foot did not reach the parting rung, but slipped between, and down came I, side over the ladder, head foremost, escaped miraculously hitting the corner of the green box, and my velvet cap saved my pate, so that I was only a little stunned, and much be-mazed, and shivering with pain, for the blow on the shin and scraping had been severe, and then there was surprise, and cowardice to boot, and I was afraid of fainting, but delighted to find I had not broken my legs. My first distinct thought — after *myself* — was, how glad I was the ladder did not break with Willy, whom I had let go up it the very day before. Finding I could stand, I got to the door, and called out to Lockie most manfully, desiring she would go for my mother (*your* mother was *my* mother then, observe, as she always is in time of need). She had not left

the breakfast-table, so was with me with the speed of morning light, and doctored, and surgeoned me, and gold-beater-skinned, and sticking-plastered, and gowlanded me, and gave me essence-of-Pity-and-Love mixed properly, which did me all the good in the world. And when I was bandaged and dressed, Francis carried me upstairs most nicely, and I siesta-d on your mother's bed in the evening; went to bed admirably early, and took all that I was required to take."

After this tale of adventure follows what was evidently the underlying purport of the whole letter: —

"I trust that after all this you have shrunk and shivered a little for me? So now, my dear Harriet, seeing that your heart is opened, I hope that you will be induced to grant me a request? I own I have cunningly tried to find the lucky moment for working upon one so unwilling to oblige me as you are. An *individual* will come down from Dublin to Trim in the course of this month, with a note of instruction from me to you and Mr. Butler. Would you be so good as to allow him the use of your drawing-room for one day? He will lodge and board in Trim, and will intrude upon you only for one day. He brings with him — now for it — I see your countenance change, and fire lighting in your eyes! But Mr. Butler is calm, thank Heaven, and says only, 'What? What? Some nonsense of Maria's. Let us hear — poor Maria! she should be indulged at her age — not long, you know, my dear Harriet — be patient ——'

"Only a box of curtains! Too late for redress!

They are all ready to be put up, and — I *do* hope you will not dislike them, my dear Harriet!"

A couple of months after this clandestine arrival of Mrs. Butler's new drawing-room curtains, the foregoing letter was supplemented by the following "humble petition," entreating to be released from a promise made by Miss Edgeworth on that occasion to her sister and brother-in-law, namely, that she would never again climb up the ladder to her beloved "Magpie place." It might serve as a pendant to the postboy's letter in *The Absentee*: —

To the Honourable and Rev. Mrs. R. Butler

"EDGEWORTHSTOWN, *September* 27, 1839.

"DEAR AND REVEREND LADY AND SIR, — On account I would not wish to be troublesome I have these two months and more forbore to write to you on the subject ever uppermost in my thoughts, and that 's wearing me to a shadow entirely — meaning the promise I made that was extorted from me in an unlucky moment of trouble, and when I was not myself (to say myself), which all here can witness, and is willing to put their hands and seals to — if required.

"About the ladder, ma'am! My leg is now well, and sounder than ever, thanks be to God, and your Ladyship, with Mrs. Edgeworth, and *Miss Lucy above all*, and Master Francis, that well-nigh broke his back carrying me up and down (and says I am heavier than his wife — lady, I mean). God bless him, for he says moreover that it 's a folly the promise I made, and void *ab origine*, I think he termed it, being made under bodily fear, and no use in life, seeing the ladder is now stronger than

ever it was, and as strong as any ladder in Christendom. The only fault it ever had, that occasioned the mischance for which it was reprobated, was *the hinges*, which is now off and condemned, so they are, out and out, and in the old iron room to rust.

"And in short, your Ladyship, I expect, will grant me a dispensation from the rash vow I made never to go up that ladder again, for it would break my heart to be bound to the letter of my rash word that way. Not a day of my life passes but I get in a fever to go up that ladder to my Magpie place where some things are a-wanting for ever. And as to getting other people's legs to go up for me, it 's neither here nor there — it can't be — except when your Ladyship is in it, or one of the dear childer — which are not coming that I can see — and in the meanwhile I am fretting to an atomy for my liberty.

"I trust his Reverence will consider me, and I leave it all to your Ladyship, and will abide as in duty bound by whatsomever you say. Only I hope you 'll earn the blessings I have ready to shower down upon your head, if you grant the humble prayer and reasonable remonstrance of your poor petitioner,

MARIA — the long-winded."

Not many signs of the solemn moralist, or sober-sided instructress of youth to be seen in all this! The fact is, the older Maria Edgeworth grew the more did those bonds and ligaments which had so hampered her youth slip away from her, and the more did the natural and spontaneous woman rise to the surface. Towards the end of 1840 she had again a rather serious illness, and was forced to remain for a considerable time in bed.

She recovered, however, and was apparently little the worse — "like one of those pith puppets," as she said of herself, "which you knock down in vain." "Even when flattest in bed," she adds, "I enjoy hearing Harriet Butler read to me till eleven o'clock at night." In 1840 she stayed for some time with her sister, Mrs. Lestock Wilson, in North Audley Street, and saw, and met, and talked with everybody who was worth seeing, meeting, and talking with, at the moment in London. It was on this occasion that Sydney Smith remarked of her — "She does not *say* witty things, but such a perfume of wit runs through all her conversation as makes it very brilliant"; a very fine compliment, and from an unquestionable judge of the matter in hand. She breakfasted with Rogers, who also invited a special dinner-party to meet her. She saw the young Queen open Parliament, and seems to have lacked little or nothing of her former vigour. It was, however, her last visit to London. After her return home the shadows began perceptibly to thicken, and before long became too dense for even her buoyancy to surmount. In 1846 her brother Francis died, and two years afterwards, in 1848, a yet greater sorrow befell her in the loss of her favourite sister, Fanny, Mrs. Lestock Wilson. Darker and deeper almost than even these personal sorrows was the sorrow and the tragedy of the entire country. The great Irish Famine was no temporary, no transitory event. On the contrary it hung for years, leaden, heavy, unescapable, over the whole of Ireland. Like all other decent Irish families, the Edgeworths denuded themselves of everything, down to the barest necessities of life, and all who were able to do so worked day and night at the relief

of distress. As for Maria, her mere name proved in those dark days to be a perfect tower of strength. She was herself greatly touched and pleased by the readiness with which her appeals for help were responded to in all directions. Amongst many such contributions a hundred and fifty barrels of flour and rice reached her from the children of Boston, labelled simply, "To Miss Edgeworth for her Poor." The very porters who had to carry up these barrels of flour and rice refused, we are told, to be paid, and a woollen comforter had in consequence to be knitted for each of them by her own still active fingers.

She had now crossed the rubicon of eighty, but in spite of this insurmountable fact, and of her many sorrows, public no less than private, her powers of enjoyment seem to have been still almost as strong as ever. "This first of January," she wrote in 1849, "was my eighty-second birthday, and I think I have as much enjoyment from books as ever I had in my life." A notable new one, the first instalment of Macaulay's *History*, reached her about this time, and she wrote a long letter on the subject to Dr. Holland, which appears to have been sent on to the historian, for we hear of his expressing pleasure in her enjoyment — "a small return for the forty years of enjoyment," so he worded it, which he had had from her. Even the old childish love of small adventures — climbing to forbidden places, and the like — seems, incredible as it may appear, to have survived with her to the very end. In the last stage of all, when she was actually within a couple of weeks of her death, we find her once more having to confess to the crime of having scrambled up to the top of a ladder, this time for the purpose of winding the

family clock. "I am heartily obliged and delighted by your being such a goose, and Richard such a gander," she writes in a letter to her sister, Mrs. Butler, of May 1849, "as to be frightened out of your wits by my going up the ladder to take off the top of the clock. . . . *Prudence of M. E., Act II.* I summoned Cassidy, let me tell you, and informed him that *I* was to wind the clock, but that *he* was promoted to take off the top of it for me. — And then up I went, and I wound the clock, just as I had done before *you* were born!"

This letter was written upon the seventh of the month, and exactly one fortnight later, upon the morning of the twenty-second of May 1849, Miss Edgeworth was seized by a sudden sensation of pain about the region of the heart, not apparently very severe. A few hours later she died, as she had always wished to do, in the arms of her faithful stepmother. Over such a death no reasonable biographer could desire, or could be expected, to grow gloomy.

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSION

Amongst the inhabitants of the republic of Letters there are a certain number who are never merely writers to us. Their books may be very good, or only moderately good, but for us they have a life wholly independent of the life of their books. We seem to know, or to have known them personally, and their writings form only a part, often quite a small part, of the general sense of liking and sympathy which awakens in us at the mention of their names. Amongst English writers two names will always stand in the very front of any such list—the names of Charles Lamb and of Walter Scott. Which of these two possesses the most of that endearing quality it would not be easy to say. As regards the first, not only do we feel towards him as we feel towards few whom we have personally known, but we refuse to admit the most palpable, the most self-admitted of his failings. We shut our eyes to them, as we do not by any means invariably shut our eyes to the failings of those who are our nearest and our dearest. He is Charles Lamb, and under the magic shelter of that name, even a little after-dinner tippling seems to be a trait rather attractive on the whole than otherwise.

In the case of Sir Walter Scott the affection which he awakens in his readers is often a great deal too

acute for pleasure. There are moments in those last years of his which we can hardly bear to think of, which sting us like the remembrance of our own unforgotten sorrows, and we are glad to remember that more than eighty healing years have rolled by since then. A few other writers may be found occupying niches here and there in this especial list, yet curiously few, when we consider how long that list is from any other standpoint. This little book will have been written to remarkably small purpose, if I have not made it clear that amongst this short list of eminently likable writers Maria Edgeworth appears to me to stand. Such a view is so entirely a personal one, that no sense of presumption can attach to the proclaiming of it. She was not — even a partial biographer must be frank — in the first flight of great writers, for although in *Castle Rackrent* she made a magnificent start, the promise which that book contained cannot be said to have been ever thoroughly fulfilled. She lost herself — *elle se perd dans votre triste utilité*, as Madame de Staël expressed it, in writing to their joint friend M. Dumont, — and she never thoroughly found herself again. What she might have been had her surroundings been different, it is idle now to speculate, and we must be content therefore to take her as she was. For my part I am abundantly content, seeing that I regard her as one of the very pleasantest personalities to be met with in the whole wide world of books.

It is too trifling a point perhaps to mention, but it can hardly have failed, I think, to strike readers of Miss Edgeworth's letters, how exceptionally free they are from the element of censoriousness or scandal — uniquely so, perhaps, in the case of letters equally

lively, and equally abounding in social details. That gift of "sportive but cutting *médisance*" which Lord Jeffrey commended her for bestowing upon her fine ladies, had certainly not been bestowed upon herself, or, if so, she succeeded in keeping it singularly dark. Turning over the volumes of her letters again, and trying to discover something of the sort, I have just alighted upon the following: "Has it escaped your notice" — she is writing in the year 1814 — "that the Venus de Medici and the Apollo Belvedere are both missing together? I make no remarks! I hate scandal! — at least I am less fond of it than Mrs. ——, but! . . ."

This libellous insinuation against the admittedly speckless virtue of the Venus de Medici is about the only clear case of *médisance* which I have so far been able to discover! A joke, on the other hand, Miss Edgeworth dearly loved, and would sometimes keep a favourite one going for a length of time which her correspondents may have found trying, as in the case of the French washerwoman — *sourde et muette* — whom she assured her sister Lucy that she was bringing back with her to Edgeworthstown from Paris, and who turned out to be a toy. It was a part of her youthfulness, that amazing youthfulness, which made her, at long past seventy, a source evidently of no small perplexity to the middle-aged brothers and sisters, several of whom were considerably more than thirty years her juniors. A saying has been often quoted of her friend and correspondent, Mrs. Somerville, who when between sixty and seventy years old, declared upon some occasion that, not only did she not feel herself to be an *old* woman, but had occasionally passing

doubts as to whether she was actually a *grown-up* woman. A similar assertion might quite well have been made by Miss Edgeworth of herself. In the two ladder incidents, and the letters arising out of them, we have excellent instances of this indomitable youthfulness — this childlike enjoyment of the very smallest adventures — traits which with her lasted, not merely until she was past eighty years of age, but actually, as has been seen, to within a few days of her death.

There seems nothing further to add. If Miss Edgeworth's early years in Ireland included a few exciting days, she lived for the most part a remarkably quiet life; a life, moreover, which was so exclusively domestic, that it could hardly have failed to be a more or less humdrum one. Neither has any attempt been made in these pages to place her upon a higher literary platform than the general consensus of cultivated judgment has long ago assigned to her. It has been the woman that has been desired to be shown in them, rather than the author, the wit, the moralist, or anything else of the sort; an exceptionally pleasant woman, nay, an exceptionally pleasant Irishwoman; one whom few people ever grew to know, without also growing to like, and whom few ever found themselves brought into even accidental contact with, without being in some way or other the better for it. That, as regards the more obvious and unavoidable relationships of life — as sister, friend, employer, daughter — that in all these respects she was as little open to reproach as it has often been given to humanity to attain to, this will, I think, without any great difficulty be conceded.

INDEX

A

Absentee, The, 131, 133–6, 139.
Adèle et Théodore, 50.
Æschylus, 188.
Ainsworth (farmer), 149.
Alison, Mr. and Mrs., 162.
Almeria, 130–1.
Amiens, Peace of, 101.
André, Major, 28–9.
Apreece, Mrs., 122.
Arabian Nights, 89.
Arago, 158.
Austen, Jane, 101.
"Aut Scotus, aut Diabolus," 114.

B

Baillie, Joanna, 124, 151.
Baird, Sir David, 167.
Ballinamuck, battle of, 80, 82–3.
Barbauld, Mrs., 40, 150.
Beaufort, Miss, 68–9.
Beddoes, Mrs. (sister), 102.
Belinda, 98, 100, 104, 196.
Berkeley, Bishop, 14.
Billamore, Mrs. ("Kitty"), 74, 84, 94.
Biot, 156.
Blakes, the Miss, 3, 5.
Breton, M. le, 111.
Bridgman, Mrs., 22.
Brinkley, Dr., 156.
Broglie, Duchesse de, 156.
Brontë, Charlotte, 126.
Brougham, 192.
Buchan, Lord, 119.
Buonaparte, 81, 111, 120, 157, 171.
Burke, 128, 173.
Butler, Mr., 202.
Byron, 123.

C

Campbell (poet), 167.
Canning, 178.
Carrol, Pat, 95.
Castle Rackrent, 40, 49, 63, 86 *seq.*, 99, 104, 127, 129, 131, 133, 142–3, 196, 211.
Castlebar, 78.
Cathcart, Lady, 90, 92.
Cats, anecdote of, 84.
Chantinée, 92.
Charles II., 24.
Cornwallis, Lord, 77, 79, 80.
Crampton, Sir Philip, 169, 170–1.
Cuvier, 156.

D

D'Arblay, Madame, 125.
Darwin, Dr., 11, 27, 32, 34, 41, 52, 103.
Davis, Mrs., 7, 15.
Davy, Sir H., 122, 181.
Day, "little Thomas," 42.
—— Mrs., 13.
—— Thomas, 10, 28, 32, 37, 100, 148–50.

De Candolle, 158.
Defoe, 87.
Delessert, Madame, 108.
Dillon, Lord and Lady, 190.
Dumont, M., 148, 151, 154, 211.
Dun, The, 130.

E

Early Lessons, 50, 196.
Edelcrantz, M., 109, 110, 180.
Edgeware, 19.
Edgeworth, Abbé, 111, 155.
—— Bishop, 19.
—— Captain John, 20, 22.
—— Charlotte (sister), 105–6, 111, 118–19.
—— Fanny (Mrs. Wilson), 155, 181, 202, 207.
—— Francis (brother), 207.
—— Francis (Clerk of the Hanaper), 19.
—— Francis ("Protestant Frank"), 25.
—— Harriet (Mrs. Butler), 155, 162, 170, 175, 202.
—— Henry (brother), 47, 50, 119–20.
—— Honora (sister), 59.
—— Honora (half-sister), 148–50, 173, 181.
—— Lady, 24.
—— Lovell (brother), 60, 112.
—— Lucy (sister), 174, 181, 212.
—— Maria: birth, 3; childhood, 4; life in Ireland, 2, 3, 5, 44 *seq.*, 59, 62 *seq.*, 104, 116, 118, 121, 213; at school, 6–9; learns French, 7; first literary efforts, 8, 49, 50; eye troubles, 9, 14, 146; visits Mr. Day at Anningsly, 10, 13; continues her father's history of their family, 37; children's tales, 47, 49, 50; associated with her father's work, 47, 50, 121; her Irish books, 49, 92, 127, 141, 143; advantages as novelist, 47, 48, 101; residence at Clifton, 60, 103; relates incidents of Irish rebellion, 73; escapes from rebels, 74, 82; success of *Castle Rackrent*, 91; tour on Continent, 106; visit to Paris, 107; receives offer of marriage, 109; escapes from France on outbreak of war, 112; friendship with Sir Walter Scott, 113; influence on Sir Walter Scott, 115; visits to Edinburgh, 113; family life, 113, 116; visits London (1813), 121, 123; lionised in London, 124–5; her shorter stories, 132; death of her father, 145–6; prepares her father's *Memoirs*, 147, 151; visit to Bowood, 148, 159; *Memoirs* of her father reviewed by *Quarterly*, 152, 154, 160; returns to Edgeworthstown, 155; visits Continent with her two sisters, 155; supper at Collège de France, 156; goes to Switzerland, 158; visit to Lyons, 159; takes an *appartement garni* in Paris, 159; returns home, 159; in London, 159–60; visit to Sir Walter Scott with her sisters, 162 *seq.*; illness in Scotland, 167; returns to Ireland, 168; visit of Sir Walter Scott to Edgeworthstown, 169; joins Sir Walter Scott's party to Killarney, 175; again visits London, 184; expedition to west of Ireland, 184; acquaintance with Martins of Ballinahinch, 185; visits Connemara, 187; visits Armagh, 191; her last novel, 194; visitors, 199–201; marriage of sisters, 102, 202; serious fall from ladder, 202; illness, 206; stays with her sister in London, 207; sees Queen Victoria open Parlia-

ment, 207; appeals for help in distress of Irish famine, 208; death, 209; as gardener, 46; benevolence, 183, 197; Dapple (her pony), 47, 72, 83–4; expenditure, 197; family history, 19 *seq.*; father's influence on her writings, 18, 39, 50, 86, 91, 99, 115–16, 135, 147, 160; her heroes and heroines, 57; invention of "The Novel with a Purpose" attributed to her, 87; lack of imagination, 39; letters, 40, 45, 49, 60–3, 68, 70, 72, 83, 86, 89, 92, 94, 96, 106, 108, 111, 119–20, 121, 133, 151, 158, 160, 181, 185, 188, 190–1, 195, 202 *seq.*, 208, 211; love of a joke, 212; love of children and childish adventures, 198, 208; personal appearance, 16, 123–4; portrait, 17 *note*; position as a personality, 211–13; as a writer, 211; prices of copyrights, 196; style, 40; submissiveness to her father, 1, 18; utilitarianism, 9, 18, 49, 87, 181, 211; youthfulness, 212.
Edgeworth, Mrs. (mother, *née* Elers), 3, 32.
—— Mrs. (*née* Elizabeth Sneyd), 12, 13, 68.
—— Mrs. (*née* Honora Sneyd), 4, 7, 10, 11, 13, 28, 32.
—— Mrs. (stepmother, author of *Memoir*), 68–9, 74, 82, 91, 103, 109, 118, 122, 135, 145, 203, 209.
—— Mrs. Anna, 182.
—— Mrs. Jane, 19–21.
—— Pakenham, 186.
—— Richard (the younger), 3, 30–2, 102.
—— Richard Lovell (father), 1, 3, 18 *seq.*, 31 *seq.*, 45, 50, 62 *seq.*, 102, 106, 108, 111, 121–4, 134, 144–6; share in his daughter's works, 63, 160; prefaces to her books, 115, 129, 130–1.
Edgeworth, Sneyd (brother), 190.
—— Sophy (half-sister), 162, 167.
—— William (brother), 166, 184.
—— family, 2, 3, 18, 37, 52, 72, 82.
Edgeworthstown, 5, 46, 63, 73, 118.
Elers, Mr., 3, 26.
Émilie de Coulanges, 132.
Ennui, 130, 136.
Euripides, 188.
Eustace, Major, 83.

F

Famine, the, 189, 207.
Fashionable Tales, 98, 130–1, 134.
Fénélon, 107.
FitzGerald, Edward, 201.
Forester, 129.
Forgive and Forget, 57.
Foster, Leslie, 182.
Francis, Sir Philip, 173.
"Frank," 52–4, 56–7, 196.
French Invasion of Ireland, 75 *seq.*
—— Revolution, 72.
Fry, Mrs., 160.

G

Gautier, Madame, 108, 157.
Geneva, 158.
Genlis, Madame de, 50, 111.
Gladstone, 154.
Goldsmith, 128.
Granard, Lady, 157.
Griselda, The Modern, 132.

H

Hall, Mr. and Mrs. (Irish novelists), 200.
Hamilton, Major-General, 77.

Hare, Mr., 1, 6, 17, 34, 48, 108, 182.
Harry and Lucy, 160, 197.
Helen, 194–5, 197.
Heriot, 166.
Herschel, 182.
Holcroft, Mr., 50.
Holland, Dr., 208.
Humboldt, 156.
Hunt, Leigh, 181.

I

Ireland, 1, 2, 5, 19 *seq.*, 44–6, 62 *seq.*, 130, 194.
Irish famine, 189, 207.
—— landlords, 141.
—— literature, 127.
—— Parliament, 102.
—— Rebellion, 44, 69, 71.

J

Jeffrey, Lord, 101, 173, 194, 212.
Jephson, Mr., 170–1, 173.
Johnson (publisher), 134, 196.
—— Dr., 170.
Josephine, Empress, 158.
Jourdain, Camille, 109.
Junius's Letters, 173.

K

Killala, Bishop of, 75.
King, Mrs. (sister), 102.
Kosciusko, 109.

L

La Harpe, 111.
Lake, General, 77–8.
Lamb, Charles, 210.
Lansdowne, Lord and Lady, 148, 151.
Lataffiere, Mr., 8.
Lataffiere, Mrs., 6, 7.
Lay of the Last Minstrel (Scott), 114.
Lazy Lawrence, 57.
Letters to Literary Ladies, 50, 196.
Life (by Miss Zimmern), 2, 48.
Life and Letters (by Hare), 1, 6, 17, 34, 48, 108, 186.
Limerick Gloves, The, 130.
Lockhart, 164, 167, 169, 171, 175–8, 195.
Londonderry, Lord, 160.
Longfords, the, 117.
Lytton, Lord, 194.

M

Macaulay, Lord, 133, 178, 208.
—— Molly, 192.
Macdonald, Marshal, 171.
Mackin, 63–5.
Mackintosh, Sir James, 123.
Manœuvring, 130.
Marcet, Mr. and Mrs., 158.
Martin, Dick, 188.
—— Mary, 185 *seq.*
Memoir (by Mrs. Edgeworth), 82, 91, 103, 109, 118, 122, 135.
Memoirs (of Mr. Edgeworth), 19 *seq.*, 31, 37, 147, 151–4, 159.
Minor Morals (Mrs. Smith), 86.
Moilliet, M. and Madame, 155, 158.
Monaghan, Charlie, 65.
Monteagle, Lady, 198.
Moor, Sergeant ("Young Moor"), 64–7.
Moore (poet), 167.
Moral Tales, 129, 196.
Morellet, Abbé, 109.
Mulready, 190.

N

Ney, Marshal, 172.
Nimmo, 185.

O

O'Kelly, 177.
Ormond, 92, 143–4.
Orphans, The, 57.
Oudinot, Madame, 111.

P

Pakenham, Miss, 117.
Parent's Assistant, The, 50, 57, 68, 196, 199.
Parry, Captain, 181.
Pastoret, M. and Madame, 109.
Patronage, 135, 195.
Popular Tales, 129.
Practical Education, 50, 63, 103.
Prony, 156.
Prussian Vase, The, 129.

Q

Quarterly Review, 47, 152.
Quentin Durward, 166.

R

Récamier, Madame, 109, 120, 157.
Ritchie, Mrs. Richmond, 57, 198.
Robinson, Dr., 191.
Rochejacquelein, Madame de, 159.
Rochfort, Mr., 73–4.
Roden, Lord, 78.
Rogers, 207.
Romilly, Sir S., 151.
Rosamund, 54 *seq.*, 196.
Rousseau, 31, 108, 111.
Ruxton, Mr., 41.
—— Mrs. (aunt), 61–3, 72, 86, 109, 133, 160, 181, 184.
—— Sophy, 40, 61, 70, 83, 121, 144, 182, 195.

S

Scott, Captain, 169, 178.
Scott, Miss, 170.
—— Sir Walter, 58, 113, 124, 162 *seq.*, 188, 210.
Seward, Miss Anna, 28.
Seymour, Lord H., 84.
Sheridan, 128, 134.
Siddons, Mrs., 160.
Simple Susan, 58, 71, 198.
Sismondi, 158.
Skene, Mrs., 166.
Smith, Lady, 184 *seq.*
—— Sir Culling, 184 *seq.*
—— Sydney, 82, 207.
Sneyd, Miss (aunt), 111, 151.
—— Mr., 8.
Somerville, Mrs., 160, 212.
Staël, Madame de, 120, 124–5, 158, 211.
Staffa, Laird of, 163.
Stein, Von, 158.
Stevenson, R. L., 52.
Stock, Dr. (Bishop of Killala), 75.
Strickland, Mr., 191.
Suard, Madame, 109.
Sweden, Ex-Queen of, 157.
Swift, 128.

T

Talma, 107.
Taylor, General, 77.
"Thady," 88–9, 92, 115.
Thistlewood, 174.
"Thrashers," 118.
Ticknor, Mr. G., 199.
Tuite, Sir E., 19.
Turnor on Crimes and Punishments, 66.

V

Vereker, Colonel, 80.
Vinci, Leonardo da, 186.
Vivian, 132.

W

Waste not, Want not, 57.
Watts, Miss, 104–5.
Waverley (Scott), 114.
Wedgwood, Mr., 41.
Wellesley, Lady, 117.
—— Sir Arthur, 117.
Westwood and Bentley, 41.
Wilkes, 173.
Wilkie, 190.
Wilson, Lestock, 149, 202.
Wordsworth, 178, 184.

Z

Zimmern, Miss, 2, 48.

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